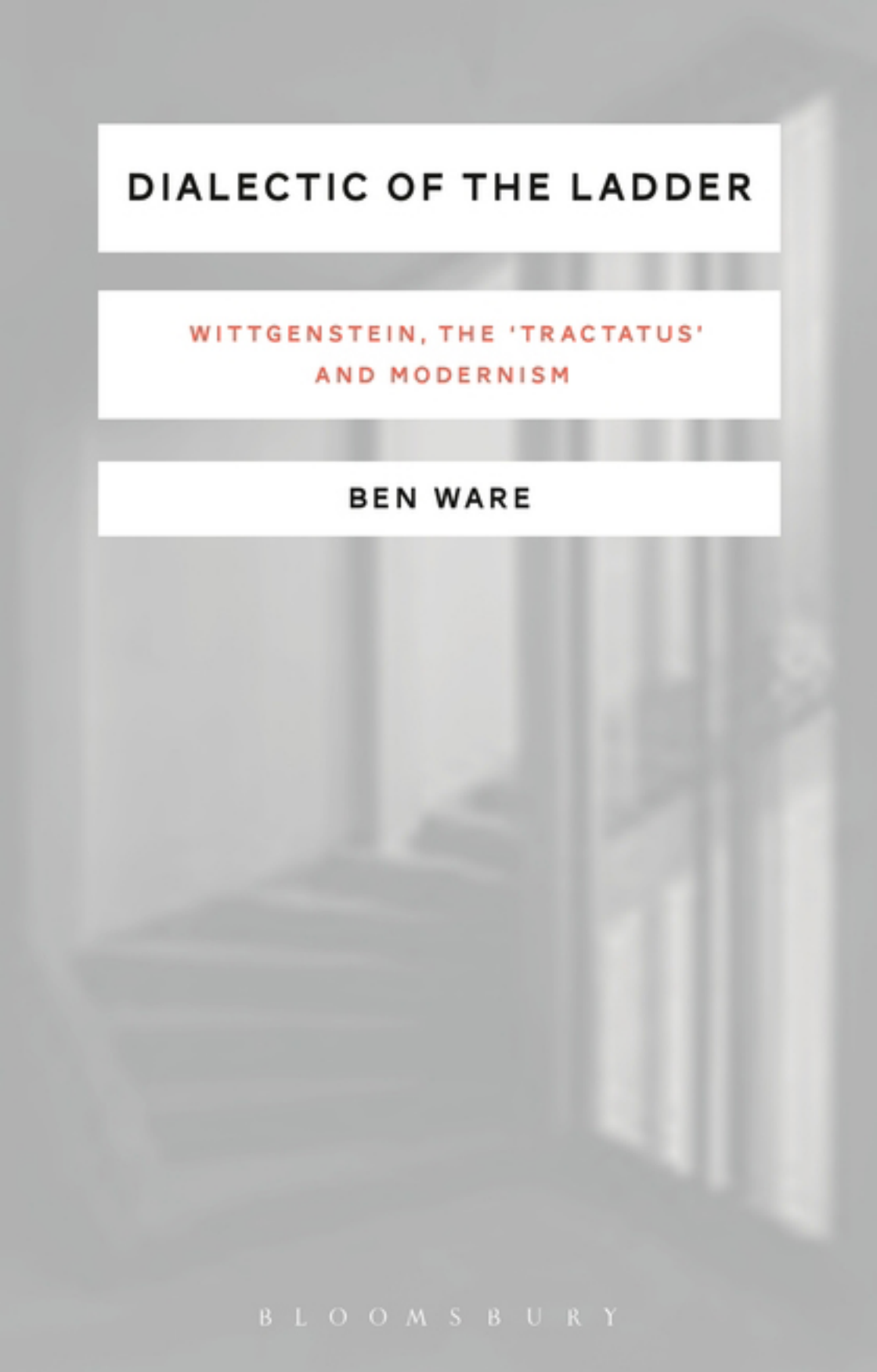




DIALECTIC OF THE LADDER

WITTGENSTEIN, THE 'TRACTATUS'
AND MODERNISM

BEN WARE

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Dialectic of the Ladder

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For Sarah

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations refer to Ludwig Wittgenstein's writings listed in alphabetical order.

- BB** *The Blue and Brown Books*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969).
- CL** *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Cambridge Letters, Correspondence With Russell, Keynes, Moore, Ramsey and Sraffa*, B.F. McGuinness and G.H. von Wright, eds (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).
- CV** *Culture and Value*, G.H. von Wright, ed., revised edition of the text by Alois Pichler, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).
- LA** *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, Cyril Barrett, ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).
- LO** *Letters to C.K. Ogden* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).
- NB** *Notebooks 1914–1916*, 2nd edition, G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe, eds, G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979).
- PI** *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edition, G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).
- PO** *Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*, J.C. Klagge and A. Nordmann, eds (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1993).
- PR** *Philosophical Remarks*, Rush Rhees, ed., Raymond Hargreaves and Roger White, trans. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975).

Abbreviations

- PT** *Prototractatus*, B.F. McGuinness, T. Nyberg and G.H. von Wright, eds, D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, trans. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).
- RFM** *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, 3rd edition, G.H. von Wright, R. Rhees and G.E.M. Anscombe, eds, G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).
- TLP** *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, German text with an English translation *en regard* by C.K. Ogden (London: Routledge, 2000).
- VC** *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, conversations recorded by F. Waismann, edited by B.F. McGuinness, translated by J. Schulte and B.F. McGuinness (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979).
- Z** *Zettel*, G.E.M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, eds, G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).

Preface

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* has fascinated and perplexed readers since its publication in 1922.¹ It is a short but intense work, made up of a series of highly compressed remarks or 'propositions'. These remarks, governed by a strict decimal numbering system which Wittgenstein considered vital to securing the book's overall clarity, deal with a range of topics: the relation between language and reality, the nature of logic, solipsism and subjectivity, the role of ethics and its connection with aesthetics, mysticism, and the aim of philosophy. Whilst there is nothing philosophically obscure about these themes, the book itself is notoriously difficult for readers to understand. Wittgenstein himself anticipated this difficulty in a letter to Bertrand Russell in March 1919:

I've written a book called "Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung" containing all my work of the last six years. I believe I've solved our problems finally. This may sound arrogant but I can't help believing it [...] [O]f course [...] *nobody* will understand it; although I believe, it's all as clear as crystal.²

Wittgenstein's fear that his book would not be understood proved, initially at least, to be correct. The manuscript was rejected by numerous publishers ('a [financial] risk that no publisher in Austria today can afford to take', as one put it);³ and in June 1919 Gottlob Frege wrote to Wittgenstein declaring: 'I find [your treatise] difficult to understand. For the most part you put your sentences down one beside the other without sufficiently detailed justification. I thus often do not know whether I ought to agree, for their sense is not sufficiently clear to me.'⁴ Although Russell eventually wrote the Introduction that would pave the way for the work's publication, this was itself taken by Wittgenstein as evidence that his book had not been understood:

[W]hen I got the German translation of the introduction, I couldn't bring myself to have it printed with my work after all. For the

fineness of your English style was – of course – quite lost and what was left was superficiality and misunderstanding.⁵

In this study, I draw attention to two features which make the *Tractatus* particularly challenging for readers. The first is the style in which the book is written. To Ludwig von Ficker, editor of the modernist journal *Der Brenner*, Wittgenstein explained: 'For the present I will say this much: the work is *strictly philosophical and at the same time literary*: but there's no gassing in it'.⁶ Unlike standard philosophical authors, Wittgenstein does not advance detailed arguments in the form of an essay or treatise; rather, he writes in short, cryptic remarks, which aim, among others things, at giving 'pleasure' to the reader.⁷ Speaking about the presentation of the text in his translator's note, C. K. Ogden writes: 'In rendering Mr Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* available for English readers, the somewhat unusual course has been adopted of printing the original side by side with the translation. Such a method of presentation seemed desirable both on account of the obvious difficulties raised by the vocabulary and in view of the *peculiar literary character* of the whole'.⁸ Commenting retrospectively upon the work in the late 1940s, Wittgenstein provides a striking description of the *Tractatus*' literary character: 'the *Tractatus* [is] highly syncopated. Every sentence in the *Tractatus* should be seen as the heading of a chapter, needing further exposition'.⁹ This aesthetic of compression and concentration is clearly summed up in the quotation from Ferdinand Kürnberger which Wittgenstein selects as the work's motto: '... and whatever a man knows, whatever is not mere rumbling and roaring that he has heard, can be said in three words'.¹⁰

The second difficulty for the reader concerns an apparent dissonance within the *Tractatus* itself. Despite appearing to put forward logical, linguistic and meta-philosophical *theories* in the body of the text, Wittgenstein writes, in the book's penultimate section:

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as nonsense, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw

away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly.

(6.54)

What, then, is one to make of these baffling sentences? How is it possible to understand a work which concludes that its own propositions are *nonsense*? Why would Wittgenstein have laboured to compose such an intricate philosophical work only to have it self-deconstruct so dramatically at the end? And, moreover, what precisely does it mean to ‘throw away’ the ladder (of nonsensical sentences) in order to see the world rightly? Things are complicated even further once we take into account Wittgenstein’s claim that ‘the book’s point is an ethical one’, and, more specifically, that:

My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have *not* written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one. My book draws limits to the sphere of the ethical from the inside as it were, and I am convinced that this is the *ONLY rigorous* way of drawing those limits. In short, I believe that where *many* others today are just *gassing*, I have managed in my book to put everything firmly into place by being silent about it.¹¹

In what follows, I put forward a reading of the *Tractatus* which treats as central the meta-philosophical, ethical and literary questions raised by the work. My argument, simply put, consists in the following claims. (1) The *Tractatus* does not aim to advance philosophical doctrines and theories, nor does it seek to communicate ineffable truths; rather, it is a dialectical work which aspires to therapeutically dissolve certain illusions of thought. (2) The *Tractatus* is an ethical work; and its ethical point is intimately bound up with its literary and aesthetic dimensions. (3) Placing the *Tractatus* in the force fields of modernism and modernity provides an invaluable framework for exploring the work’s dialectical, literary, and ethical strands. To some of Wittgenstein’s more traditional exegetes, this latter claim will no doubt sound controversial. Surely, they will argue, the *real* context of the *Tractatus* is ‘the great works of Frege and the writings of [...] Bertand Russell’: the names mentioned by

Wittgenstein himself in the book's Preface.¹² To this, my reply is straightforward: examining the *Tractatus* in the contexts of modernism and modernity is not intended to disregard existing (and at times valuable) analytical readings; rather, it is to suggest a new way of *seeing* the early work, one which strives to grasp it under a *changed aspect*. The *Tractatus*, as I understand it, demands that we meet it in a *radical spirit*: one that is unafraid to ask challenging questions not only about what and how it *says*, but also about the framework within which it is read. Establishing new patterns of family resemblance by blasting the *Tractatus* out of its traditional genre, can, I would argue, be a liberating reading strategy – one that can potentially save us from the philosophical dogmas into which we so easily fall.

Modernity-Modernism-Avant-Garde

If we think of the world's future, we always mean the place it will get to if it keeps going as we see it going now and it doesn't occur to us that it is not going in a straight line but in a curve and that its direction is constantly changing.

– Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*¹

Language, culture and crisis

From his literary organ *Die Fackel* [*The Torch*], the Viennese satirist, poet and playwright Karl Kraus launched his devastating critique of Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. His declaration ‘In dieser großen Zeit’ [‘In These Great Times’], first published in a December 1914 edition of the journal, begins with the following words:

In these times [...] in which things are happening that could not be imagined and in which what can no longer be *imagined* must *happen*, for if one could imagine it, it would not happen [...] In the realm of poverty of imagination where people die of spiritual famine without feeling spiritual hunger, where pens are dipped in blood and swords in ink, that which is not thought must be done, but that which is only thought is unutterable.²

Kraus's speech, written two months after the outbreak of World War One, is an attempt to sum up the paradoxical nature of the times. Events, he argues, have overtaken the human capacity to imagine them at exactly the point when what can no longer be imagined must happen. According to Kraus, these are times which are characterized by

intellectual poverty and contradictory forms of violence. Thus he says that people are dying from 'spiritual famine *without* feeling spiritual hunger', and that 'pens are dipped in blood and swords in ink'. Importantly, for Kraus, this crisis is felt most significantly as a crisis of language. These are times, he observes, when 'that which is not thought must be done, but that which is only thought is *unutterable*'. In his address, Kraus goes on to announce his '[r]espect for [...] the subordination of language before this misfortune', and he gives the following warning:

Expect no words of my own from me. Nor would I be able to say anything new, for in the room in which one writes there is such noise, and at this time one should not determine whether it comes from animals, from children, or merely from mortars. He who encourages deeds with words desecrates words and deeds and is doubly despicable [...] Let him who has something to say come forward and be silent!³

Kraus's response to the new 'great times' thus reflects the contradictory logic of the age. He *declares* that he has *nothing to say* '[except] these words which barely manage to prevent silence from being misinterpreted'.⁴ In a world of interminable scientific and technological 'progress', Kraus perceives a nightmare of domination. This force not only threatens the physical lives of mankind, it also leaves them spiritually impoverished and 'groping for words'.⁵

The relation between language, culture and crisis, which Kraus's speech here explores, can be understood in the broader context of the intellectual and aesthetic discourses of the times. Where Kraus sees modern, mass society as effectuating a cacophony of speech ('in the room in which one writes there is such noise') and a moral misuse of words,⁶ other writers see it as making language – and in particular *artistic language* – all but impossible. For instance, in his 1912 'The Letter of Lord Chandos', the Austrian poet and dramatist Hugo von Hofmannsthal speaks of a world in which all hitherto fixed meanings have been displaced by a sense of dispossession, alienation and

conceptual fragmentation: 'For me everything disintegrated into parts, those parts again into parts; no longer would anything let itself be encompassed by one idea.'⁷ For Hofmannsthal, this process of psychological disintegration results in a state of linguistic helplessness in which the writer is no longer able to express anything through words:

I have lost completely the ability to think or to speak of anything coherently [. . .] Single words [float] round me; they [congeal] into eyes which [stare] at me and into which I [am] forced to stare back [. . .] I could present in sensible words as little as I could say anything precise about the inner movements of my intestines or a congestion of my blood.⁸

Hofmannsthal's profound sense of linguistic scepticism finds itself mirrored, several years later, in the writings of the French poet and playwright Antonin Artaud. In a 1923 letter to the editor and poet Jacques Rivière, Artaud points to the difficulty of finding words as language increasingly separates itself from the processes of thought: 'My thought abandons me at every step – from the simple fact of thought to the external fact of its materialization in words.'⁹ Similarly, in T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, the poet-narrator undertakes an 'intolerable wrestle/ With words and meanings' only to find that:

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still.¹⁰

For each of these writers then, albeit in radically different ways, the beginning of the twentieth century is marked by a struggle with the limits and the possibilities of language. The language that prevails in this society is seen as the expression of alienated subjectivity. One cannot navigate one's way through individual experiences in and by means of such a language. As Artaud writes: 'by their nature and defining character, fixed once and for all, [words] arrest and paralyze

thought instead of permitting it and fostering its development'.¹¹ For this reason, many writers of the period come to believe that they are faced with a choice: to revolutionize language and attempt to break through the linguistic and artistic barriers of their society, or to admit the impossibility of language and to abandon words altogether.

The paradoxes of modernity

Before looking at how some of these linguistic problems are dealt with in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, my concern, in the present chapter, will be to situate them within the broader contexts of modernity, modernism and avant-gardism. What is meant by these three terms is itself, however, historically and conceptually problematic. I will therefore begin by sketching some general remarks about their meaning and use.

The word 'modern' comes into the English language from the Latin word 'modernus', an adjective and noun, coined from the adverb 'modo' meaning 'recently, just now'.¹² Modernus, as Peter Osborne observes, 'first came into use in the fifth century AD at the time of the collapse of the Roman Empire, when the cyclical opposition of "old and new" characteristic of pagan antiquity was replaced by the sense of an irreversible break with the past'.¹³ 'The sense of the present as new which emerges at this time became', as Osborne points out, 'the basis for the conflicts between Ancients and Moderns that punctuated the Middle Ages, from the second half of the twelfth century to the beginning of the Renaissance'.¹⁴ During the fifteenth century, however, a new relationship between the ancient and the modern was established. In this period, modern became 'opposed to medieval rather than to ancient'; and, since the Renaissance prized ancient over other cultures, the modern was preferred only insofar as it attempted to *imitate* antiquity.¹⁵ It was, therefore, not until the sixteenth century that modern came to denote a distinctly new period;¹⁶ and not until a century after

that that the division between the ancients and the moderns developed into a fully fledged discourse.¹⁷

In terms of formal origins, then, we might say that modernity in its full sense – that is, as an epoch which is conscious of itself as qualitatively different from the past and orientated towards the future – begins in the eighteenth century following the famous *querelle des anciens et des modernes*. In the *querelle*, authors such as Fontenelle and Charles Perrault attempted to apply the concept of *progress*, as developed in modern science and philosophy, to the domains of literature and art.¹⁸ However, as Hans Robert Jauss writes, ‘these *modernes* were by no means conscious of witnessing the dawn of a new age; much to the contrary, they thought that humanity having spent its youth in antiquity and its middle age in the Renaissance, had now entered into its senescence’.¹⁹ Thus, ‘in the opening dialogue of his *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes*’, Perrault argues that the *modernes*, as heirs to the knowledge of their Greek and Roman predecessors, ‘must be the more experienced ones’, and so ‘the genuine *anciens*’.²⁰

With the dissolution of this rapport between ancients and moderns during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, a new experience of history opened up which emphasized an ‘irreversible progression of historical time’.²¹ Within this new temporal space, the historical parallel between ancient and modern was rendered obsolete, giving way to a sense of the modern as emphatically ‘Other’. Over time, however, this new progressivist mode of modern consciousness was itself superseded: in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, following the revolutionary upheavals of 1848, there emerged a new radicalized conception of modernity [*modernité*] which endeavoured to liberate itself from all ties to the past. This modernity opposed tradition with the idea of the present, and, consequently, the defining feature of aesthetic works constructed under its banner was ‘the new’.²² As Jürgen Habermas writes: ‘we are, in a way, still the contemporaries of [this] kind of aesthetic modernity [...] [t]he characteristic of such works is “the new” which will be overcome and made obsolete through the novelty of the next style’.²³ This idea of ‘the new’ can however be seen to embody an

aesthetic paradox: 'while that which is [...] "stylish" [...] soon become[s] out-moded, that which is modern preserves a secret tie to the classical'.²⁴ Habermas explains this paradox by pointing to the new set of relations which hold between present and past: 'Of course, whatever can survive time has always been considered to be a classic. But the emphatically modern document no longer borrows this power of being a classic from the authority of a past epoch; instead, a modern work becomes a classic because it has once been authentically modern.'²⁵

This new aesthetic conception of modernity is given its clearest expression by Charles Baudelaire in his 1863 essay 'The Painter of Modern Life'. In the essay, a study of the artist Constantin Guys, Baudelaire defines modernity as the point at which the 'transient' and the 'eternal' intersect:

Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable [...]. In order that any form of modernity may be worthy of becoming antiquity, the mysterious beauty that human life unintentionally puts into it must have been extracted from it [...]. Woe betide the man who goes to antiquity for the study of anything other than ideal art, logic and general method! By immersing himself too deeply in it, he will no longer have the present in his mind's eye; he throws away the value and the privileges afforded by circumstance; for nearly all our originality comes from the stamp that time impresses upon our sensibility.²⁶

Here Baudelaire's conception of modernity embodies a seemingly paradoxical logic. On the one hand, modernity is understood in terms of its 'presentness' – that is, its pure instantaneous quality. In this respect, it implies a complete immersion in the 'now' and the suppression of all anteriority. On the other hand, by remaining faithful to its transient status, and thus giving up any claim to serve as a model for the future, modernity also proves itself worthy of one day becoming antiquity. For Baudelaire, this same logic also applies to art. On his account, authentically modern works of art are ones which remain tied to the

moment of their emergence. However, by immersing themselves in the present, such works can also point to the possibility of transcending the flow of historical time. Moreover, for Baudelaire, through their synthesis of the transient and the eternal, these modern works of art reflect the two-fold nature of beauty and thus provide a means through which modern beauty can disclose itself:

Beauty is made up, on the one hand, of an element that is eternal and invariable [...] and, on the other, of a relative circumstantial element, which we may like to call [...] contemporaneity, fashion, morality, passion. Without this second element, which is like the amusing, teasing, appetite-whetting coating of the divine cake, the first element would be indigestible, tasteless, unadapted and inappropriate to human nature.²⁷

Baudelaire's new and dramatic articulation of modernity renders impossible any systematic comparison between the ancients and the moderns. On his view, all historical periods have their own forms of modernity, which are unique and tied to their age.²⁸ Thus, although it is possible to look back to antiquity in order to study the 'general method' of art, this is 'superfluous' in helping the artist 'to understand the beauty of the present day'.²⁹ For Baudelaire, 'all our originality'³⁰ comes from a complete and forgetful immersion in the 'present'. In this respect, when he uses the term 'modernity', it is less a historico-descriptive signifier and more a categorical imperative: the artist or poet *ought* to embrace modern life as a necessary end in itself.³¹

For the critic Paul de Man, this radical understanding of modernity runs up against a conceptual problem: when artists or writers 'assert their own modernity, they are bound to discover their dependence on similar assertions made by their [...] predecessors'; and, consequently, any individual claim to being *absolutely new* will '[turn] out to be the repetition of a claim that has always already been made'.³² De Man applies this reading specifically to Baudelaire: 'As soon as Baudelaire has to replace the single instant of invention, conceived as an act, by a successive movement that involves at least two distinct moments, he

enters into a world that assumes the depths and complications of an articulated time, an interdependence between past and future that prevents any present from ever coming into being.³³ Here de Man points to a seemingly insurmountable paradox at the heart of modernity: 'the more radical the rejection of anything that [comes] before, the greater the dependence on the past'.³⁴ Understood from this perspective, modernity's desire to transcend the barriers of art and literature and to break free from the framework of historical time will prove to be self-defeating. Such a desire will '[fold] back upon itself',³⁵ feeding the very cycles of repetition and continuity which it so vehemently rejects.

'Modernity': Two contemporary analyses

In our own period, the term 'modernity' appears with increasing frequency and has become not only a theoretically complex signifier but also an ideological tool. In the Preface to his study *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*,³⁶ Fredric Jameson examines the term's contemporary political revival and the uses to which it has been put by exponents of free market thinking. The 'mysterious something' called modernity is, Jameson argues, 'the illusion that the West has something no one else possesses – but which [the rest of the world] ought to desire for themselves': an exportable commodity which can be 'described at great length by those who are called upon to sell the product in question'.³⁷ He goes on to cite the following passage from Oskar Lafontaine's memoir – a book detailing the latter's fate under the Social Democratic administration of Gerhard Schröder in Germany – as evidence of how the word modernity today simply goes proxy for economic neoliberalism:

The words 'modernization' and 'modernity' have been degraded to fashionable concepts under which you can think anything at all. If you try to figure out what the people called 'modernizers' today understand under the term 'modernity', you find that it is little else than economic and social adaptation to the supposed constraints of

the global market [...] Modernity has simply become a word for the conformity to such economic constraints. The question of how we want to live together and what kind of society we want has become a completely unmodern question and is no longer posed at all.³⁸

Jameson also detects in the current use of the word modernity a specific conceptual incoherence: adversaries of the free market, such as Socialists and Marxists, are considered *unmodern* to the extent that they are committed to the basic paradigm of political *modernism*; 'modernity', by contrast – taken in its approved contemporary sense – 'is good because it is postmodern', even though the latter word is rarely used in this context. For Jameson, then, the terms 'modern', 'modernization' and 'modernity' have become 'part of a fundamental political discursive struggle' which aims at foreclosing on any imagined future beyond capitalism: 'If free-market positions can be systematically identified with modernity and habitually grasped as representing what is modern, then the free-market people have won a fundamental victory which goes well beyond the older ideological victories.'³⁹

If Jameson sees the hollowing out of the term modernity as indicative of the ideological closure of the project in its present form, then, for the art historian T.J. Clark, 'what we are living through is modernity's triumph'.⁴⁰ Unlike Jameson, Clark does not attempt to carry out a formal analysis of modernity and its related concepts; rather, he conducts what he describes as an archaeological excavation of modernism – where modernism is here imagined as 'a handful of disconnected pieces left over from a holocaust that had utterly wiped out the pieces' context'.⁴¹ Clark explains this method by pointing to the dialectic which holds between modernity and modernism. 'Modernism', he writes, 'is our antiquity [...] a ruin, the logic of whose architecture we do not remotely grasp'.⁴² According to Clark, this is not because we are living in a new or radically different age, but rather because the modernity which modernism opposed and evaded has now fully materialized:

[I]t is just because the "modernity" which modernism prophesied has finally arrived that the forms of representation it originally

gave rise to are now unreadable [...] The intervening (and interminable) holocaust was modernization. Modernism is unintelligible now because it had truck with a modernity not yet fully in place.⁴³

Clark's definition of modernity takes from the writings of Max Weber the idea that modernity involves the disenchantment of the social world: 'Modernity means contingency. It points to a social order which has turned from the worship of ancestors and past authorities to the pursuit of a projected future – of goods, pleasures, freedoms, forms of control over nature, or infinities of information.'⁴⁴ This process of demythification is however intolerable, for, as Clark argues, it is accompanied by 'a great emptying and sanitizing of the imagination. Without ancestor-worship, meaning is in short supply – "meaning" here meaning agreed-on and instituted forms of value and understanding, implicit orders, stories and images in which a culture crystallizes its sense of the struggle with the realm of necessity and the reality of pain and death.'⁴⁵ In this respect, Clark sees modernity as a profoundly contradictory social force. On the one hand, it satisfies mankind's desire for the new: new technologies, new scientific advancements and new personal and social freedoms; on the other hand, these new-found freedoms become an impossible burden for mankind to bear. Indeed, as Clark observes, '[a]ny mass movement or cult figure that promises a way out [...] will be clung to like grim death.'⁴⁶

Whilst Jameson and Clark differ in their respective analyses, both agree that the concept of modernity is inseparable from the logic of capitalist accumulation. Jameson therefore speaks of '[the] fundamental meaning of modernity which is that of world-wide capitalism itself', and, consequently, of 'the experimental procedure of substituting capitalism for modernity in all the contexts in which the latter appears.'⁴⁷ Clark, likewise, remarks that modernity is 'tied to, and propelled by, one central process: the accumulation of capital, and the spread of capitalist markets into more and more of the world and the texture of human dealings.'⁴⁸ Defining modernity in relation to the development of capitalism (specifically, the logic of commodification and profit

maximization spreading to all areas of social life), allows us to make an important preliminary distinction between the terms modernity and modernism. Modernity, although radically *uneven* across the globe, unites the whole of humankind, subjecting everyone to its processes. However, as Marshall Berman points out, this 'is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish'.⁴⁹ This is the universe famously portrayed by Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto* in which '[a]ll fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air.'⁵⁰ Modernism, by contrast, refers only to a set of geographically divided and intellectually diverse aesthetic formations which emerge, from the second half of the nineteenth century through to the mid-to-late twentieth century, within modernity's broader framework. To the extent that the antagonistic currents which we now call 'modernist' demonstrate any kind of family resemblance,⁵¹ it is resemblance relating to the *directedness* of their form: (i) all are committed to an affirmation of the *new* and to the production of works which engage with the novelty of the present; (ii) all are driven by a *negation-compulsion*, whereby the old – understood as past forms or past ideas – is systematically discarded as part of a process of arriving at a transformed aesthetic, ethical or political perspective. Both of these tendencies will be vital to bear in mind when we turn, in the next chapter, to our discussion of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.

The emergence of autonomy and the ideology of taste

'Modernism', writes Jay Bernstein, 'is modern art's self-consciousness of itself as an autonomous practice.' Importantly, however, modernist 'autonomous art operates as a critique of modernity [...] rescu[ing] from cognitive and rational oblivion our embodied experience and the standing of unique, particular things as the proper objects of

such experience'.⁵² In order to draw out the full implications of Bernstein's remark, it will first be necessary to trace (albeit briefly) the historical emergence of art as an autonomous sphere within bourgeois society, and to alight upon the ideas of the thinker whom Bernstein encourages us to read as the key 'expositor of modernism': Immanuel Kant.⁵³

Stimulated by a re-examination of Weberian social theory, Habermas characterizes the development of modernity as the separation of life into three autonomous spheres: science, morality and art.⁵⁴ These three spheres come to be fully differentiated during the period of the Enlightenment, following the fragmentation of 'the unified world conceptions of religion and metaphysics'.⁵⁵ For Habermas, this separation has the following consequences:

[T]he problems inherited from [the] older world-views could be rearranged so as to fall under specific aspects of validity: truth, normative rightness, authenticity and beauty. They could then be handled as questions of knowledge, or of justice and morality, or of taste. Scientific discourse, theories of morality, jurisprudence, the production and criticism of art, could in turn be institutionalized. Each domain of culture could be made to correspond to cultural professions, in which problems could be dealt with as the concern of special experts.⁵⁶

The separation of the spheres of science, morality and art is then, for Habermas, part of a whole project of social rationalization. Each sphere develops in accordance with its own 'inner logic' and is set free from its 'esoteric forms'.⁵⁷ In one sense, this transformation is powerfully positive: science disenchant nature at the same time as it liberates the knowing subject; morality recognizes the subjective freedom of individuals; and art, freed from the demands of church, court and state, is finally allowed to determine its own form and content. However, as Habermas points out, this rationalization of culture does not necessarily succeed in producing an overall enrichment of social life: 'With cultural rationalization of this sort, the threat increases that the life-world,

whose traditional substance has already been devalued, will become more and more impoverished.⁵⁸

Looking specifically at the case of art, the effects of autonomization are particularly acute. Liberated from ritual, art becomes an autonomous sphere, swearing fidelity to its own law. In this respect, as Habermas points out in *Legitimation Crisis*, art takes 'up positions on behalf of the victims of bourgeois rationalization' by becoming 'the refuge for a satisfaction, even if only virtual, of those needs that have become, as it were, illegal in the material life-process of bourgeois society'.⁵⁹ However, the point at which art secures its autonomous status is also the point at which its critical purchase on life is problematized. Freed from the concerns of everyday practical life, art simultaneously loses its social functionality and thus risks obscuring its very purpose. As Theodor Adorno writes:

Blindness was ever an aspect of art; in the age of art's emancipation, however, this blindness has begun to predominate in spite of, if not because of, art's lost naïveté, which, as Hegel already perceived, art cannot undo. This binds art to a naïveté of a second order: the uncertainty over what purpose it serves. It is uncertain whether art is still possible; whether, with its complete emancipation, it did not sever its own preconditions.⁶⁰

In Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790), the separation of art from the practical concerns of life is reflected at the level of theory. In his study – the third *Critique* – what Kant investigates is not the work of art itself, but rather the nature of aesthetic judgements, which Kant calls judgements of taste.⁶¹ According to Kant, a pure judgement of taste is to be understood as *disinterested*. As he puts it: "The delight which determines the judgement of taste is independent of all interest."⁶² Moreover, because aesthetic judgements are detached from individual interests, they also involve a claim to *universal validity*:

For, since the delight is not based on any inclination of the Subject [...] but the Subject feels himself completely *free* in respect of the liking which he accords to the object, he can find as reason for his

delight no personal conditions to which his own subjective self might alone be party. Hence he must regard it as resting on what he may also presuppose in every other person; and therefore he must believe that he has reason for demanding a similar delight from every one.⁶³

For Kant, then, aesthetic judgements – which take ‘the beautiful’⁶⁴ as their object – are at once subjective and universal: they involve the ‘free play’ of individual ‘cognitive powers’⁶⁵ whilst at the same time being ‘valid for every one’.⁶⁶ Ernst Cassirer captures this aspect of Kant’s aesthetic theory when he remarks: ‘In the phenomena of the beautiful the inconceivable thing happens, that in contemplating beauty every subject remains in itself and is immersed purely in its own inner state, while at the same time it is absolved of all contingent particularity and knows itself to be the bearer of a total feeling which no longer belongs to “this” or “that”.’⁶⁷ Thus understood, the Kantian doctrine of aesthetic judgement poses a radical challenge to the bourgeois view of human relations. In claiming that one’s subjective aesthetic feelings are inherently universal, it can be seen to signify a community of subjects united in the very structure of their conscious being. As Robert L. Zimmerman puts it: ‘The Kantian mind is a delicately balanced machine [...] whose machinations are repeatable and duplicative even though they occur in different bodies.’ Consequently, ‘what one feels,’ aesthetically speaking, ‘derives from a process which everyone can feel; therefore what one feels, although *one* feels it, is not private, but public.’⁶⁸ This, we might say, is the utopian moment in Kant, the moment at which the dichotomy between facts and values is bridged by the individual coming to recognize him or herself as part of a universal community.

If, however, the Kantian aesthetic defines itself (positively) in opposition to the bourgeois ideas of self-interest and utility, then it can also be seen to be implicated in the logic of that which it seeks to criticize. In claiming that all pure aesthetic judgements are *disinterested*, that they are the product of the *free play* of the cognitive powers and that they have *universal validity*, Kant, one might contend, uses aesthetic principles to rationalize a particular socio-cultural ethos. In the

Postscript to his study *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Pierre Bourdieu writes: ‘Kant’s analysis of the judgement of taste finds its real basis in a set of aesthetic principles which are the universalization of the dispositions associated with a particular social and economic condition.’⁶⁹ On Bourdieu’s account, ‘the theory of pure taste is grounded in an empirical social relation, as is shown by the opposition it makes between the agreeable [...] and culture, or its allusions to the teaching and educability of taste. The antithesis between culture and bodily pleasure (or nature) is rooted in the opposition between the cultivated bourgeoisie and the people, the imaginary site of uncultivated nature, barbarously wallowing in pure enjoyment.’⁷⁰ In this respect, we might say that there is a fundamental ambiguity at the heart of the Kantian aesthetic, and one which relates generally to the autonomous status of art in bourgeois society. On the one hand, by grounding subjective aesthetic feeling in intersubjective agreement and shared judgement, Kant’s theory of taste emphasizes commonness and solidarity over personal sentiment; on the other hand, this theory of taste also opens up a division between legitimate and illegitimate taste – a division between cultivated pleasure (intellectual reflection) and civilized pleasure (enjoyment).⁷¹ Consequently, as Bourdieu argues, one can see the third *Critique* as ‘the expression of the sublimated interests’ of a particular class; namely, the ‘intellectual bourgeoisie, “whose legitimation [...] consists primarily in its intellectual, scientific or artistic accomplishments”’.⁷²

Modernism: From negation to emancipation

Writing in 1960 about the critical and theoretical concerns of modernism, Clement Greenberg states:

Western civilization is not the first civilization to turn around and question its own foundations, but it is the one that has gone furthest in doing so. I identify Modernism with the intensification, almost exacerbation, of this self-critical tendency that began with

the philosopher Kant. Because he was the first to criticize the means itself of criticism, I conceive of Kant as, the first real Modernist.⁷³

As Greenberg's article 'Modernist Painting' continues:

The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence. Kant used logic to establish the limits of logic, and while he withdrew much from its old jurisdiction, logic was left all the more secure in what there remained to it.⁷⁴

Greenberg thus defines modernism as the historical tendency within art towards absolute self-referential autonomy.⁷⁵ On his view, the intellectual origins of modernism can be traced back not to Kant's third *Critique*, but rather to his first: the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the first *Critique*, Kant argues that true knowledge must proceed not through an analysis of the facts of reason, but through the critique of reason itself, whereby its determinate and necessary limits are demonstrated from principles.⁷⁶ For Greenberg, modernist art follows a similar path. Unlike previous art forms, the new art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century aims to establish its own area of competence by discovering what is intrinsic to it alone. With painting this involves freedom from sculptural properties like tactility and literary ones like narrative.⁷⁷ Instead, as Greenberg points out, modernist art draws attention to the shape of the canvas and most importantly to 'the ineluctable flatness' of a picture's surface.⁷⁸ Comparing this new kind of artistic enterprise with previous forms, Greenberg writes:

Realistic, naturalistic art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art; Modernism used art to call attention to art. The limitations that constitute the medium of painting – the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of the pigment – were treated by the Old Masters as negative factors that could be acknowledged only implicitly or indirectly. Under Modernism

these same limitations came to be regarded as positive factors, and were acknowledged openly.⁷⁹

For Greenberg, then, the essence of modernism lies in art's self-criticism; and, as he puts it, it is '[t]he task of self-criticism [...] to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art'. 'Thus,' as he continues, 'each art [would] be rendered "pure", and in its "purity" find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence.'⁸⁰ One of the most striking features of Greenberg's analysis here is the commitment which it displays to a type of historical gradualism. The author resists explicitly and repeatedly the idea that modernism involves a *break* with the artistic past: 'Nothing could be further from the authentic art of our time than the idea of a rupture of continuity. Art is – among other things – continuity, and is unthinkable without it. Lacking the past of art, and the need and compulsion to maintain its standards of excellence, Modernist art would lack both substance and justification.'⁸¹ Here Greenberg's commitment to the past as a standard of artistic quality runs counter to the view that modernism, within the domains of art, literature and philosophy, operates as a site of rupture and negation. As T.J. Clark writes in a critical assessment of Greenberg's work: 'The very way that modernist art has insisted on its medium has been by negating that medium's ordinary consistency – by pulling it apart, emptying it, producing gaps and silences, making it stand as the opposite of sense or continuity, having matter be the synonym for resistance.'⁸² Modernism is thus not to be understood in terms of art's continuity with the art of the past; rather, 'the fact of Art, in modernism, is the fact of negation.'⁸³

The twin concepts of negation and autonomy are central to Adorno's exposition of modernism in *Aesthetic Theory*. For Adorno, it is not simply that modernist works negate the ordinary consistency of their medium, but rather (and more dialectically) that negation itself constitutes the process by which modernist works place meaning on the agenda: 'Artwork that rigorously negates meaning is by this very rigor bound to the same density and unity that was once requisite to the

presence of meaning. Artworks become nexuses of meaning, even against their will, to the extent that they negate meaning.⁸⁴ Adorno brings out this point when he remarks of Samuel Beckett's plays that they

are absurd not because of the absence of any meaning, for then they would be simply irrelevant, but because they put meaning on trial; they unfold its history. [Beckett's] work is ruled as much by an obsession with positive nothingness as by the obsession with a meaninglessness that has developed historically and is thus in a sense merited, though this meritedness in no way allows any positive meaning to be reclaimed.⁸⁵

The deliberately contradictory phrase 'positive nothingness' is used here by Adorno to refer to the nothingness, or negative meaning, which Beckett's plays *achieve* through their *active negation* of positive meaning. Beckett's *Endgame*, Adorno writes, 'is neither a play about the atomic bomb nor is it contentless; the determinate negation of its content [*Inhalt*] becomes its formal principle and the negation of content altogether.'⁸⁶ Whilst Beckett's plays cancel positive meaning, they do not however emancipate themselves from *form*: they are still plays, and it is their status as works, according to Adorno, which allows them to hint at (to 'show' rather than to 'say') the possibility of meaning-to-come.

For Adorno, modernism signals a new stage in art's progressive separation from social life. Art's original autonomy – its freedom from the constraints of church and court – is 'nourished by the idea of humanity'.⁸⁷ In modernist art, this autonomy is 'shattered'.⁸⁸ As society becomes increasingly fragmented and dehumanized, the social element within art is eradicated and its detachment from other areas of life becomes total. As Adorno thus remarks: 'It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist.'⁸⁹ In *Aesthetic Theory*, however, art's autonomy has a 'double character',⁹⁰ entailing both positive and negative aspects. Whilst art is, on the one hand, '*hounded* into emptiness by dint of its emphatic isolation from practical life'; on the other hand,

‘its being without empirical purpose’ proves to be the very source of art’s power.⁹¹ In an administered society in which everything and everyone *must* have a social function, modernist art repels empirical reality through its pure *functionlessness*. Precisely by *being-for-themselves* – by flaunting their existential emptiness and ontological uniqueness – modernist artworks are able to act as flashpoints of resistance, as silent negations of the rationalized (utilitarian) order from which they emerge:

By crystallizing in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as “socially useful,” [modernist art] criticizes society by merely existing, for which puritans of all stripes condemn it. There is nothing pure, nothing structured strictly according to its own immanent law, that does not implicitly criticize the debasement of a situation evolving in the direction of a total exchange society in which everything is heteronomously defined. Art’s asociality is the determinate negation of a determinate society.⁹²

For Adorno, ‘[w]hat is social in [modernist] art is its immanent movement against society, not its manifest opinions’⁹³ – that is to say, what is emancipatory in modernism is the form, not the content, of individual works. This points to an important distinction in Adorno’s later thinking between ‘autonomous’ and ‘committed’ works of art. On Adorno’s view, committed works (those with an *overt* political message, such as the plays of Brecht or Sartre) are unable to offer a critique of instrumental reason precisely because they themselves serve an instrumental purpose. Therefore, the task of social criticism falls to autonomous works: ‘This is not the time for political works of art; rather, politics has migrated into the autonomous work of art, and it has penetrated most deeply into works that present themselves as politically dead.’⁹⁴ The point here is not that the intentions of politically committed works are in themselves incorrect, but rather that ‘[a]ll commitment to the world has to be canceled *if the idea of the committed work of art is to be fulfilled*’.⁹⁵ By tying themselves to an overt set of political and ethical

ends, traditionally committed works of art betray both themselves and their audience. The problem, as Adorno sees it, is primarily one of *form*: 'Hidden in the notion of a "message," of art's manifesto, even if it is politically radical, is a moment of accommodation to the world; the gesture of addressing the listener contains a secret complicity with those being addressed, who can, however, be released from their illusions only if that complicity is rescinded.'⁹⁶ It is therefore autonomous works – works which refuse all manifest social content and which instead raise their critique of the social to the level of form – which are singularly capable of fulfilling the promise of committed art:

Kafka's prose and Beckett's plays [...] have an effect in comparison to which official works of committed art look like children's games [...]. In dismantling illusion they explode art from the inside, whereas proclaimed commitment only subjugates art from the outside, hence only illusorily. Their implacability compels the change in attitude that committed works only demand.⁹⁷

Socially speaking, however, the situation of modernist autonomous art is aporetic, as Adorno himself observes: 'If art cedes its autonomy, it delivers itself over to the machinations of the status quo; if art remains strictly for-itself, it nonetheless submits to integration as one harmless domain among others.'⁹⁸ One response to this modernist problem of autonomy is suggested by the avant-garde. According to Peter Bürger, the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century signify a shift in art's confrontation with bourgeois administrative logic and the laws of the capitalist marketplace. Unlike their predecessors, the artists of the avant-garde do not accept the detachment of art from social life; rather, the avant-garde and their products are consciously directed towards an attack upon art's 'institutional status'. What they demand, as Bürger puts it, is an integration of 'art into the praxis of life':⁹⁹

The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is

unassociated with the life praxis of men. When the avant-gardistes demand that art become practical once again, they do not mean that the contents of works of art should be socially significant. The demand is not raised at the level of the contents of individual works. Rather, it directs itself to the way art functions in society, a process that does as much to determine the effect that works have as does the particular content.¹⁰⁰

According to Bürger, then, the twentieth century avant-garde sets out to change both the production of art and its reception. The revolutionary principle is to negate the very concept of the 'autonomous' work (the product of individuated and isolated artistic labour), and to replace it with an idea of aesthetic production that is bound up with life praxis. This change – which Bürger refers to as 'the sublation of art'¹⁰¹ – is not intended simply to destroy art; nor is it intended to preserve everyday life as it exists within bourgeois society. Rather, by transferring art to the praxis of life, the attempt is made 'to organize a new life praxis' from within art itself.¹⁰²

On this view, it becomes clear how we can distinguish between avant-garde and modernism.¹⁰³ Modernist literature and '[a]rt dissociate[s] itself from its communicative function [...] and radically set[s] itself against society'.¹⁰⁴ This development, however, only impacts upon artistic content; art's institutional status remains unchanged.¹⁰⁵ Avant-gardism, by contrast, actively challenges the institutional status of art: its effort is not simply to attack traditional techniques of art and writing, but rather to reintegrate art into life praxis. Understood in this way, '[i]t is no accident that the active, even aggressive artistic manifesto – an address to fellow artists and society – [becomes] the preferred medium of expression for the avant-garde artist of the twentieth century'.¹⁰⁶

The belief that the praxis of life can be transformed through certain modes of artistic activity does not, however, entail one type of politics. Like modernism, the avant-garde is 'ambidextrous':¹⁰⁷ at different times and in different places it takes both a left (French surrealism, Russian futurism) and a right (Italian futurism) political turn. As Raymond Williams writes: '[W]ithin what may at first hearing sound like closely

comparable denunciations of the bourgeois, there are already radically different positions, which would lead eventually, both theoretically and under the pressure of actual political crisis, not only to different but to directly opposed kinds of politics: to Fascism or to Communism; to social democracy or to conservatism and the cult of excellence.¹⁰⁸ The coming together of art and politics in the various avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century thus produces a range of aesthetico-political possibilities: the new advanced art is capable of existing alongside both progressive and reactionary impulses. Consequently, as Williams observes, it can 'find its place either in a new social order or in a culturally transformed but otherwise persistent and recuperated old order'.¹⁰⁹

Modernism, mass culture and linguistic turns

I would like to close the current chapter by returning (albeit from a slightly different perspective) to the issue from which I started: the relation between modernism, language and culture. More than a simple separation of art from non-art, modernism defines itself in opposition to a specific social and cultural force in early twentieth-century society: commodity culture or *mass culture*. Simply put, mass culture is culture governed exclusively by the laws of mechanical reproduction and the imperatives of profit. It includes commercial art and literature, magazines, advertising, and new forms of popular music: 'a culture of instant assimilation, of object reconciliation to the everyday, of avoidance of difficulty, pretence to indifference, equality before the image of capital'.¹¹⁰ Borrowing the German word, the name which Greenberg gives to this new culture is 'kitsch':

Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times.¹¹¹

Modernism's attempt to transcend the forces of mass culture is nowhere more apparent than at the level of language. Most, if not all, of the formations within modernism are motivated by a belief in the intrinsic value of language, and, consequently, by a desire to protect it against the encroachment of a rapidly expanding commercial sphere. Against the appetite 'for rapid reading and the habitual conscious and unconscious skimming of newspaper and advertising slogans', modern poetry thus places a new emphasis 'on the materiality and density of language, on words felt not as transparency but rather as things in themselves'.¹¹² Likewise, 'in the realm of philosophy the bristling jargon of seemingly private languages is to be evaluated against the advertising copybook recommendations of "clarity" as the essence of "good writing": whereas the latter seeks to hurry the reader past his own received ideas, difficulty is inscribed in the former as the sign of the effort which must be made to think real thoughts'.¹¹³ At the level of summary, then, we might say that one of the defining features of modernist literary practice is given by the Russian Formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky when he speaks of 'the resurrection of the word'.¹¹⁴ In a 1914 essay of the same name, Shklovsky argues that in order for the creative potential of language to be revived, the word must first be set free from its routinized operations within everyday practical communication:

The most ancient poetic creation of man was the creation of words. Now words are dead, and language is like a graveyard, but an image was once alive in the newly-born word [...] And now, today, when the artist wishes to deal with living form and with the living, not the dead, word, and wishes to give the word features, he has broken it down and mangled it up [...] New, living words are created. The ancient diamonds of words recover their former brilliance. This new language is incomprehensible, difficult, and cannot be read like the *Stock Exchange Bulletin*.¹¹⁵

Modernism's turn back to language is, however, more complex and problematic than it might first appear. Whilst, at one level, many modernist literary experimenters sense the need to challenge old

linguistic certainties in order to make way for 'the new', they remain, at the same time, strongly attached to what is being discarded. As Richard Sheppard observes: 'the God who controlled the apparent certainties of conventional syntax may have been pronounced dead, but his corpse still oppressed the imagination of many linguistic agnostics and atheists, whether they knew it or not'.¹¹⁶ As a result, a great deal of modernist writing is informed by the tension arising out of the conflicting tendencies of the old and the new, the traditional and the modern.¹¹⁷ This conflict, as Perry Anderson points out, is itself determined by a specific set of historical and social circumstances:

The persistence of the '*anciens régimes*', and the academicism concomitant with them, provided a critical range of cultural values *against which* insurgent forms of art could measure themselves, but also *in terms of which* they could partly articulate themselves [...] [T]he old order, precisely in its still partially aristocratic colouration, afforded a set of available codes and resources from which the ravages of the market as an organizational principle of culture and society – uniformly detested by every species of modernism – could also be resisted.¹¹⁸

If a great deal of literary modernism can be understood as involving a turn back to language (and, in some cases, to the language of the past), then there is also a flip-side to this tradition. At the same time as one current seeks a return to the material density of the signifier, another points to the limitations of the word and to the restrictive and inadequate nature of human languages in general. This mode of linguistic scepticism can itself take a number of turns. The first and most obvious of these is evidenced in a general critical consciousness towards language. Here one can think of Fritz Mauthner's philosophical critique of language,¹¹⁹ and some of its literary descendants including Hofmannsthal's 'The Letter of Lord Chandos'. Another turn (one which results from a similar lack of linguistic faith, but which reacts more affirmatively to this situation), is that which attempts to turn away from the word, and to move, in a number of different directions, towards the non-verbal or to

silence.¹²⁰ This latter shift stands in opposition to the desire for a resurrection of the word. Through its emphasis on *what cannot be said*, it can be seen as an attempt to dislodge the primacy of the verbal or the written sign, and, consequently, to found new modes of intellectual and sensuous life outside of language: 'There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical [...] Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent' (6.522,7).

It is here, then, that we might break off our current investigations and move towards the next stage of our analysis: a close study of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein, as I will show, takes up a position both inside and outside the contexts I have been outlining. Although he is primarily concerned with questions of language, his writings probe a variety of other issues which are central to both modernity and modernism: aesthetics, culture, subjectivity, epistemology, ethics and politics. Far from being a conventional philosophical author, Wittgenstein develops a new mode of philosophical exposition which, as Terry Eagleton points out, places him in the company of 'poets and composers, playwrights and novelists'.¹²¹ Not only does Wittgenstein refer to his writings as 'literary' and 'poetic', he also produces, in the case of the *Tractatus*, a work which is modernist through and through: difficult, formalistically pure, perfectionist, heroic, resistant to any kind of instrumental appropriation. It is no surprise therefore that Wittgenstein's original intention was to have his text published in Ludwig von Ficker's modernist literary journal *Der Brenner*. The aesthetic sensibility which informs the *Tractatus* is one that is anticipated, in 1912, by Bertrand Russell: '[Wittgenstein's] disposition is that of an artist, intuitive and moody. [...] [H]e has the artist's feeling that he will produce the perfect thing or nothing'.¹²² This same sensibility is acknowledged, years later, by Rudolf Carnap:

[Wittgenstein's] point of view and his attitude towards people and problems, even theoretical problems, were much more similar to those of a *creative artist* than to those of a scientist; one might almost say, similar to those of a religious prophet or a seer. When he started to formulate his view on some specific philosophical

problem, we often felt the internal struggle that occurred in him at that very moment, a struggle by which he tried to penetrate from darkness to light under an intense and painful strain [...] When finally, sometimes after a prolonged arduous effort, his answer came forth, his statement stood before us like *a newly created piece of art* or a divine revelation.¹²³

What, then, are the guiding concerns of Wittgenstein's enigmatic early work? What strategies and methods does its author employ? What does the book demand of its reader? It is to these difficult questions that we will now turn.

Ethics and the Literary in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*

Rather than print the Ergänzungen [supplements] to make the book fatter leave a dozen white sheets for the reader to swear into when he has purchased the book and can't understand it.

– Wittgenstein to C.K. Ogden (May 5, 1922)¹

I.

Strictly philosophical and at the same time literary

In 1919, whilst searching for a publisher for the 'Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung' (later *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*), Wittgenstein wrote to Ludwig von Ficker – editor of the literary journal *Der Brenner* – providing Ficker with a number of instructions for reading the book. In one letter, written in October of that year, Wittgenstein remarks: 'For the present I will say this much: the work [the *Tractatus*] is strictly philosophical and at the same time literary: but there's no gassing in it.'² In a second letter, written shortly afterwards, he explains to von Ficker that 'the book's point is an ethical one.'³ Wittgenstein says that he had once intended to include a few words about this in the *Tractatus*' Preface, and that now he will write out these words for von Ficker as they might provide him with 'a key to the work'. As the letter continues:

My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have *not* written. And it is precisely this second part that is the

important one. My book draws limits to the sphere of the ethical from the inside as it were, and I am convinced that this is the *ONLY rigorous* way of drawing those limits. In short, I believe that where *many* others today are just *gassing*, I have managed in my book to put everything firmly into place by being silent about it. And for that reason, unless I am very much mistaken, the book will say a great deal that you yourself want to say.⁴

According to Wittgenstein then, in addition to being ‘strictly philosophical,’ the *Tractatus* is also a literary work with an ethical point. The book’s ethical point is, however, as Wittgenstein indicates, not explicitly *stated* in the book; rather, it is delimited ‘from the inside,’ by the book itself.

Taken on their own, the guidelines for reading the *Tractatus* which Wittgenstein gives to von Ficker appear somewhat obscure and puzzling. What, we might ask, can Wittgenstein mean by referring to his text (a text understood by many to be a logico-linguistic treatise inspired by the writings of Frege and Russell) as literary? Moreover, how are we to interpret the claim that the most important part of the book – the ethical part – is that which has *not* been written? In this chapter, I will argue that in order to grasp the significance of the literary and the ethical for Wittgenstein (and in order to see how they interconnect in his early work), we must first of all come to understand the method of the *Tractatus* itself, and, in particular, the type of activity which the book calls upon its readers to perform.

In the letter in which he outlines the ethical point of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein goes on to tell von Ficker to pay most attention to the book’s Preface and Conclusion. As he writes: ‘you won’t see [what] is said in the book. For now, I would recommend you to read the *preface* and the *conclusion*, because they contain the most direct expression of the point of the book.’⁵ In the Preface, Wittgenstein says that ‘[t]he book deals with the problems of philosophy and shows [...] that the method of formulating these problems rests on the misunderstanding of the logic of our language’ (*TLP*, p. 27). He goes on to remark that the book will draw a limit ‘not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts [...] in language’;

and that what lies beyond this limit will be '*einfach Unsinn*' – simply nonsense (*TLP*, p. 27). In the concluding sections of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein makes the following provocative declarations:

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as nonsense, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it).

He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly.

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

(6.54, 7)

These dramatic closing remarks have continued to baffle readers of the *Tractatus*. How is it possible to understand a work which concludes that its own sentences are nonsense? How are we to understand these (nonsensical) sentences as a ladder which must be thrown away once it has been climbed? And how, precisely, does one mark the boundary between speech (what can be said) and silence?

Unsurprisingly, many early commentators on the *Tractatus* took Wittgenstein's remarks to be paradoxical. As Bertrand Russell wrote in his Introduction to the published work: '[A]fter all, Mr Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said, thus suggesting to the sceptical reader that possibly there may be some loophole through a hierarchy of languages, or by some other exit' (*TLP*, p. 22). Russell was not alone in the 'intellectual discomfort' (*TLP*, p. 22) which the *Tractatus* left him feeling. The philosopher and mathematician Frank Ramsey was also puzzled by what Wittgenstein had to say in the book, particularly by his comments concerning 'whereof one cannot speak' (7).⁶ As Ramsey famously quipped: 'what we can't say, we can't say, and we can't whistle it either.'⁷ Elsewhere he wrote (in response to *Tractatus* section 6.54): if 'the chief proposition of philosophy is that philosophy is nonsense [...] we must then take seriously that it is nonsense, and not pretend, as Wittgenstein does, that it is important nonsense!'⁸

If Wittgenstein's remarks were difficult for early readers of the *Tractatus* to decipher, then, for contemporary readers, such remarks are no less problematic. Questions concerning the Preface, the concluding remarks and their relation to the body of the text have given rise to a number of radically opposed readings of the book. Broadly speaking, it is now possible to identify two main philosophical approaches to the text. Whilst neither of these approaches forms a homogenous body of work, the exegetical principles underlying each one can be outlined.

How to read the *Tractatus*

The first approach to the book – referred to variously as the ‘traditional’, ‘standard’, ‘orthodox’, ‘metaphysical’ or ‘ineffability’ reading – argues that we need to understand the *Tractatus* in light of a fundamental distinction between what can be *said* in language and that which can only be *shown*. According to this characterization, there are features of reality which, on account of the logical structure of our thought, cannot be expressed. These features of reality can nevertheless be ‘conveyed’, ‘hinted at’ or ‘exhibited’ by language, because they correspond to features of language. This line of interpretation has been advanced by a number of well-known Tractarian scholars.⁹ G.E.M. Anscombe, for example, puts the distinction between saying and showing this way:

[A]n important part is played in the *Tractatus* by the things which, though they cannot be ‘said’, are yet ‘shewn’ or ‘displayed’. That is to say: it would be right to call them ‘true’ if, *per impossible*, they could be said; in fact they cannot be called true, since they cannot be said, but ‘can be shewn’, or ‘are exhibited’, in the propositions saying the various things that can be said.¹⁰

On Anscombe's view, there are numerous things which, by the *Tractatus*' lights, can be shown but not said. These include ‘the logic of the world’;

the logical relationships among propositions, ethical principles and, also, 'the truth of solipsism'.¹¹ Anscombe suggests that the point of the *Tractatus* is to convey deep insights into these features of reality, despite the fact that any attempt to speak about them will result in nonsense.

Traditional interpretations also tend to carry with them a specific narrative about the general development of Wittgenstein's thought – one which emphasizes a significant break between his early and later writings.¹² On such readings, Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus*, is taken to be putting forward a metaphysical account of the relation between language and reality which is essentially *realist*. According to David Pears: 'the *Tractatus* is basically realistic in the following sense: language enjoys certain options on the surface, but deeper down it is founded on the intrinsic nature of objects, which is not our creation but is set over against us in mysterious independence'.¹³ The later Wittgenstein, so the traditional narrative continues, rejects the *Tractatus*' truth-conditional theory of meaning and replaces it with an *antirealist* account of meaning based on *assertability conditions*.¹⁴ Thus, as P.M.S. Hacker summarizes: 'Any attempt to trace out continuity and contrast between [Wittgenstein's] earlier and later work with respect to the conception of philosophy must bear in mind the fact that the axis of reference of the whole investigation has been rotated around a fixed point'.¹⁵

The second approach to the *Tractatus* – now known as the 'anti-metaphysical', 'resolute', 'therapeutic', 'austere', or 'new'¹⁶ reading – claims that the traditional account entirely 'misses the philosophy of Wittgenstein'.¹⁷ Rather than attempting to lay down a strict blueprint for reading the book, anti-metaphysical readings aim instead to 'say something about how the book ought *not* to be read'.¹⁸ Specifically, such readings reject two central features of traditional accounts of the *Tractatus*. First, they reject the idea that the point of the book is to convey ineffable insights which can be shown but not said. Second, they reject the idea that the *Tractatus* is concerned to put forward a theory of meaning – a theory against which the sentences

of the book are shown to be nonsense (6.54). According to anti-metaphysical interpreters, the book operates not by advancing doctrines and theories, but by bringing its readers to see the *emptiness* of all such philosophical theorizing. One of the ways the *Tractatus* does this is by 'showing that the philosophical temptation to *cosmic exile* – to use a phrase coined by W.V.O. Quine – 'is an illusory quest'.¹⁹ This temptation involves the search for a perspective 'from which we can view the relation between language (or thought) and the world independently of our own situation in the world'.²⁰ For Wittgenstein however, on the anti-metaphysical account, such a perspective is unintelligible; indeed, the only way in which we can grasp the nature of language and thought is through 'attention to our everyday forms of expression and to the world those forms of expression serve to reveal'.²¹

Like traditional readings, anti-metaphysical readings also commonly advance a specific view about the development of Wittgenstein's thought. What separates the latter from the former, however, is that the latter insist upon a much greater degree of continuity between Wittgenstein's early and later work. For anti-metaphysical readers, this continuity consists in the fact that *both early and late* Wittgenstein's philosophical aim is a *therapeutic* one: his texts present themselves as mirrors in which the reader sees her 'own thinking with all its deformities and with this assistance can set it in order'.²² The objective of such therapeutic activity is, as Oskari Kuusela writes,

[t]o release a person from the grip of the misleading conceptions she has adopted, that is, from the misleading pictures that hold her thought in a cramp, causing disquietude and not allowing her to reach clarity about the matters at hand.²³

What is sketched here is, of course, only a brief overview. In the next section of this chapter, I thus want to flesh out these points by presenting a reading of the *Tractatus* which begins by examining three key themes within traditional interpretations: first, the nature of names and objects; second, the relation between propositions and pictures;

and third, the question of logical and linguistic form. In providing this analysis, my aim will be twofold: (i) to show how almost inevitably the *Tractatus* leads the reader towards an ineffability reading; and (ii) to demonstrate how this reading unravels once we bring an anti-metaphysical approach – or what I will here call a *dialectical* approach – to bear on the book. It will be my claim that a dialectical reading provides not only the most coherent framework for understanding the *Tractatus* philosophically, but also the most compelling way of approaching the early Wittgenstein as a modernist author. One of the ways that such a reading achieves this, is by drawing us away from *mere philosophising* (the kind of abstract and reified thinking which Wittgenstein criticizes both early and late), and by returning us instead to the literary and the ethical – precisely the domains which, in his letter to von Ficker, Wittgenstein stresses as being ‘key’ to his work.

Giving the essence of the world

In an entry in his *Notebooks 1914–1916*, Wittgenstein remarks on the fundamental concerns governing his investigations into logic: ‘The great problem round which everything that I write turns is: Is there an order in the world *a priori*, and if so what does it consist in?’²⁴ While much of the *Tractatus* is given over to a discussion of the conditions and possibilities of language, its earliest sections can be understood as sketching an answer to these two questions from the *Notebooks*.

The *Tractatus* itself begins much in the style of a metaphysical treatise on the constitution of reality. As Wittgenstein states: ‘The world is everything that is the case’ (1); and ‘[t]he world is the totality of facts, not of things’ (1.1). Facts, he argues, may be either positive or negative (2.06): a positive fact (that which *is* the case) ‘is the existence of atomic facts’ (2) or ‘states of affairs.’²⁵ An atomic fact is defined by Wittgenstein as a ‘combination of objects (entities, things)’ (2.01). Notoriously, Wittgenstein does not give any examples of ‘objects’ in the *Tractatus*.²⁶

He does, however, sketch a clear outline of how they are to be understood and why they are of vital importance to his ontological picture. An object, Wittgenstein argues, is a possible constituent of an atomic fact (2.011); and its possibility of occurring in combination with other objects in atomic facts is its nature (2.0123), its internal properties (2.01231) and its form (2.0141). Objects are simple (2.02), but they can combine into complexes (2.0201). Because any possible world must contain the same objects as this one (2.022), change is only an alteration in the configuration of objects (2.022–2.231, 2.0271). Objects are independent, in so far as they can occur in all possible circumstances (2.0122), and fixed, as it is the configuration of objects, and not the objects themselves, which changes (2.0271). Put together in a definite way (2.031), objects make up the unalterable and persistent *form*, *substance* and *content* of reality (2.023, 2.024, 2.025).

These opening passages of the *Tractatus* are notoriously formidable. The writing is ‘extraordinarily compressed’²⁷ and technical terms are ‘piled up and reduplicated’.²⁸ The pronouncements themselves – put forward, according to Bertrand Russell, much in the manner of ‘a Czar’s ukase’²⁹ – suggest that the book is advancing a set of incontrovertible and axiomatic logical truths. Key to this logical method is the intricate decimal numbering system which Wittgenstein employs.³⁰ In a letter to von Ficker, Wittgenstein explains that this numbering system is vital to securing the book’s overall clarity: ‘By the way: the decimal numbers of my remarks absolutely must be printed alongside them, because they alone make the book perspicuous and clear: without the numbering it would be an incomprehensible jumble.’³¹

Despite the complexity of the *Tractatus’* opening remarks, the arguments for atomic facts and objects become clear once they are considered in relation to language. In the book, on traditional interpretations, Wittgenstein argues that there is an *isomorphic* relation between language and reality. Just as the simple objects in the world combine to form atomic facts, so, in language, propositional elements – ‘simple signs’ (3.201) or ‘words’ (4.026) – combine to form ‘elementary propositions’ (4.21).³² In an elementary proposition, the simple elements

are names, and the meaning of names is identical with the objects they stand in for. As Wittgenstein puts it:

The simple signs employed in propositions are called names [...]

In the proposition the name represents the object.

Objects I can only *name*. Signs represent them.

(3.202, 3.22, 3.221)

And further:

The name cannot be analysed any further by any definition. It is a primitive sign [...]

The elementary proposition consists of names. It is a connexion, a concatenation, of names.

(3.26, 4.22)

For traditional interpreters, Wittgenstein's account of the relation between language (names and propositions) and reality (objects and atomic facts) exemplifies his early 'realist' metaphysics, at the centre of which stands the truth-conditional theory of meaning.³³ On this theory, meaning breaks down into two components. First, to understand an everyday (complex) proposition means to understand it as a 'truth-function' of a set of 'elementary propositions' (5). That is, '[e]very statement about complexes can be analyzed into a statement about their constituent parts, and into those propositions which completely describe the complexes' (2.0201).³⁴ Second, the meaning of elementary propositions is, in turn, explained by showing how they relate to the world in such a way that *the way the world is* makes them true or false:

If the elementary proposition is true, the atomic fact exists; if it is false the atomic fact does not exist.

The specification of all true elementary propositions describes the world completely. The world is completely described by the specification of all elementary propositions plus the specification, which of them are true and which false.

(4.25, 4.26)

On this view, elementary propositions each pick out a specific set of ‘atomic facts’ (or ‘state of affairs’) in the world, and, consequently, a complete account of their meaning will be given by saying that they are true if and only if the possible set of atomic facts (or state of affairs) with which they are correlated actually exists.

‘We make to ourselves pictures of facts’

A key point in the Tractarian analysis of language is the idea that propositions are not simply mixtures of words (3.141). Rather, they are ‘articulate’ (3.141, 3.251) – that is, they have sense (3.144) – and in communicating a sense, a proposition shows its relation to reality:

The proposition *shows* its sense.

The proposition *shows* how things stand, *if* it is true [...]

The proposition constructs a world with the help of a logical scaffolding, and therefore one can actually see in the proposition all the logical features possessed by reality *if* it is true.

(4.022, 4.023)

If we look closely at this connection between language and reality, we can see that the two spheres are *internally* related. The nature of this relation, as Wittgenstein argues, is to be understood pictorially; or, more decisively, in terms of ‘that pictorial, internal relation, which holds between language and world’ (4.014):

The proposition communicates to us a state of affairs, therefore it must be *essentially* connected with the state of affairs.

And the connection is, in fact, that it is its logical picture.

The proposition only asserts something, in so far as it is a picture.

(4.03)

To grasp the full significance of Wittgenstein’s notion of picturing, it will be necessary to look at the key concepts which he employs in the

Tractatus. Of these, the most important are *abbilden* ['to depict'] and *darstellen* ['to represent'].³⁵ The principal distinction here is that the two terms – *Abbildung* and *Darstellung* – refer to different aspects of the picture's relation to reality.³⁶ A picture is an *Abbildung* of reality, a depiction of what actually exists in the world, and a *Darstellung*, a representation of a *possible* set of atomic facts. Therefore, we might say that the picture has an actual subject, which it depicts [*abbildet*], and that it shows that subject as standing in a particular relation to the world in the form of a representation. Wittgenstein highlights the distinction between the two concepts when he remarks:

The picture *depicts* reality by *representing* a possibility of the existence and the non-existence of atomic facts.

(2.201)³⁷

The significance of drawing the distinction between the depicting and the representing aspects of a picture becomes clear once we are able to grasp it in the following context: it is because a picture can be regarded as both a depiction and a representation that it can show its subject both *correctly* and *incorrectly*. If it were not an *Abbildung* there would be nothing for the picture to be right or wrong about; and if it were not a *Darstellung* of a particular situation then it would not be telling us anything, true or false, about the subject. This point is clarified by Wittgenstein when he states: 'The picture agrees with reality or not; it is right or wrong, true or false' (2.21). 'In order to discover whether the picture is true or false we must compare it with reality. It cannot be discovered from the picture alone whether it is true or false. There is no picture which is a priori true' (2.223–2.225). For traditional interpreters of the *Tractatus*, it is here that the picture metaphor becomes instructive for one's thinking about language. As Wittgenstein argues: 'The proposition is a picture of reality' (4.01). Therefore, just as the characteristic mark of a picture is that its truth or falsity cannot be given in advance of one's knowing how it stands in relation to the world, so, too, one 'cannot give elementary propositions a priori' (5.5571). In order to ascertain whether the proposition is true or false, we must look

outside the proposition and compare it with how things stand in the world. As Wittgenstein puts it: ‘reality is compared with the proposition’ (4.05). Understood in this way, the distinguishing feature of propositions is that they are *bipolar* – that is, they are capable of being true *and* capable of being false depending on how things stand in the world.³⁸

‘The logical form of reality’

When we speak of a picture ‘picturing’ a certain situation, Wittgenstein says that we can think of it as reaching right up to the world (2.1511). He goes on to say that the individual pictorial elements are like ‘feelers’ with which the picture reaches out and ‘touches reality’ (2.1515). By this, what Wittgenstein suggests is that in order to be a picture in any significant sense, what the picture and the situation it represents must have in common is not simply the actual arrangement of the elements in each case but, most importantly, a *form of representation*:

What the picture must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it after its manner – rightly or falsely – is its form of representation.

(2.17)

How, then, according to the *Tractatus*, can this form of representation be defined? At section 2.15, Wittgenstein provides the reader with an insight: ‘That the elements of the picture are combined with one another in a definite way, represents that the things are so combined with one another. This connexion of the elements of the picture is called its structure, and the possibility of this structure is called the form of representation of the picture’ (2.15). ‘The form of representation’, as Wittgenstein continues, ‘is the possibility that the things are combined with one another as are the elements of the picture’ (2.151). On this account, it is possible for the picture to ‘represent every reality whose form it has. The spatial picture, everything spatial, the coloured,

everything coloured' (2.171). However, what the picture *cannot* represent is its form of representation:

The picture [...] cannot represent its form of representation; it shows it forth.

The picture represents its object from without [...]

But the picture cannot place itself outside of its form of representation.
(2.172, 2.173, 2.174)

This form of representation, as Wittgenstein argues, is a *mirroring* (5.511) of the 'logical form [...]' of reality' (2.18). Given that pictures and propositions are internally related, propositions share this logical form, but they cannot represent it: 'Propositions can represent the whole reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it – the logical form' (4.12). Representing logical form is impossible, since to do so we would 'have to be able to put ourselves with the propositions outside logic, that is outside the world' (4.12). Whilst it cannot be represented by language, logical form is, however, *shown* in language by propositions:

Propositions cannot represent the logical form: this mirrors itself in the propositions.

That which mirrors itself in language, language cannot represent.

That which expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot express by language.

The propositions *show* the logical form of reality.

They exhibit it.

(4.121)

Logical form is, then, that which propositions (and pictures) must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it at all. This form, however, cannot be stated or described in language but can *only* be shown (4.1212).³⁹

According to traditional interpreters, this distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown runs throughout the whole of the *Tractatus* and reveals how certain sentences succeed in communicating truths which outrun the limits of ordinary language.⁴⁰ Whilst these sentences are strictly speaking *nonsensical*, they can nevertheless be distinguished from plain nonsense in that they bring us to see what cannot be said. Thus, at the end of the book, on traditional readings, we know that the world is ‘the totality of facts’, and that language and reality share a common ‘logical form’. Except, however, that we cannot actually *say* these things; for in saying them we would be transgressing the strictly proper bounds of sense defined by the *Tractatus*.

Discarding ladders, dealing with nonsense

In her book *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind*, Cora Diamond argues that traditional interpretations of the *Tractatus* have been characterized by their ‘failure to take seriously what Wittgenstein says about philosophy itself’.⁴¹ She therefore invites us to look again at the idea that there are certain features of reality which cannot be stated or described but which are in some sense shown by features of our language. Specifically, for Diamond, how compelled one will feel to attribute this doctrine to the *Tractatus* will depend upon how seriously one takes Wittgenstein’s exhortation to readers, at the end of the book, to throw away the ladder once it has been climbed. Here it will be helpful to remind ourselves of what exactly Wittgenstein says in the book at section 6.54:

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as nonsense, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)

He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly.

(6.54)

Diamond proposes a radical re-reading of these sentences in relation to the book as a whole, challenging the reader to consider their implications in the following way:

So it looks as if there is this whatever-it-is [...] some essential feature of reality, which reality has [...] but which we cannot say or think that it has. What exactly is supposed to be left of that, after we have thrown away the ladder? Are we going to keep the idea that there is something or other in reality that we gesture at, however badly, when we speak of 'the logical form of reality', so that *it, what* we were gesturing at, is there but cannot be expressed in words?⁴²

As Diamond continues:

That is what I want to call chickening out [...] To chicken out is to pretend to throw away the ladder while standing firmly, or as firmly as one can, on it.⁴³

On Diamond's reading, there is thus a kind of ethico-philosophical bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) involved in not taking Wittgenstein at his word at section 6.54.⁴⁴ We cannot, on the one hand, recognize what he is saying about the *Tractatus*' sentences (i.e. that they are nonsense), and, on the other hand, still try to make sense of the *content* of the book. Therefore, when we read the book *resolutely*⁴⁵ – that is, when we come to understand it in terms of what Diamond calls 'the frame'⁴⁶ – we must accept that its sentences are strictly speaking 'real nonsense, plain nonsense'.⁴⁷ Consequently, all the *Tractatus*' apparent doctrines, including the ontology, the picture theory of meaning and the distinction between saying and showing, must be seen as part of the nonsense that must eventually be discarded.

According to Diamond, understanding the book's conclusion involves understanding the specific demands which Wittgenstein places upon the reader. In the first sentence of *Tractatus* section 6.54, Wittgenstein writes: 'he who understands *me* finally recognizes *them* as nonsense'.⁴⁸ Here, as Diamond observes, Wittgenstein makes a crucial distinction between understanding *him* and understanding *the*

sentences of the book.⁴⁹ What the reader is asked to do is *not* to understand the book's nonsensical sentences, but rather to understand the author and the type of activity in which he is engaged. Diamond's philosophical ally, James Conant, describes this activity as 'one of showing that we suffer from the illusion of thinking that we mean something when we mean nothing'.⁵⁰ Wittgenstein's aim, as Conant goes on to argue, is thus 'to undo our attraction to various grammatically well-formed strings of words that resonate with the aura of sense'.⁵¹

This, I would argue, provides us with a provisional illustration of how the *Tractatus* operates as a *dialectical* work. The book begins by putting forward a philosophically sophisticated account of the relation between language and the world, at the centre of which is the view that the logical form of reality is reflected in the logical structure of language (4.12). At the end of the book, however, once we come to understand the point of view of the author, we see that such theories about the relation between language and the world are, in fact, simply nonsense: they are *philosophical temptations* which must be overcome if we are to see the world aright (6.54).

The engagement with Frege

In order to grasp the full significance of Diamond's argument, it will be necessary to establish the philosophical context in which her reading of the *Tractatus* takes place. Diamond argues that Wittgenstein's view of nonsense, and the related distinction between saying and showing, arises out of his far-reaching engagement with the work of Gottlob Frege; and, in particular, with Frege's famous discussion of concepts and objects.⁵² In his article 'On Concept and Object', Frege argues that there is an unbridgeable gap between concepts and objects, such that what can sensibly be said of one cannot be said of the other.⁵³ As a criterion for distinguishing objects from concepts, Frege lays down 'that the singular definite article always indicates an object, whereas the indefinite article accompanies a concept-word'.⁵⁴ However, Benno Kerry objects

to Frege's criterion and he puts forward the following counter-example: 'The concept "horse" is a concept easily attained.'⁵⁵ In this example, because the phrase 'the concept "horse"' begins with a definite article, it must, on Frege's account, refer to an object. On the other hand, if what the statement says is true, then it must refer to a concept. Thus Kerry believes that he has given an example of something – the concept *horse* – that is both an object and a concept.

Faced with the problem of having to maintain 'that the concept *horse* is not a concept', Frege argues that this difficulty shows nothing more than an unavoidable 'awkwardness of language'.⁵⁶ Such awkwardness will not, however, be encountered in a logically perspicuous notation like his *Begriffsschrift* (concept-script). The *Begriffsschrift*, as Frege defines it, is an 'ideography' – a symbolic formula language designed to lay bare the 'conceptual content' of sentences.⁵⁷ For Frege, this ideography can be used to unmask the illusions generated by 'ordinary language' by showing clearly which statements can and which cannot be meaningfully formulated. Frege sums up his project with the following words:

[I]t is one of the tasks of philosophy to break the domination of the word over the human spirit by laying bare the misconceptions that through the use of language often almost unavoidably arise concerning the relations between concepts and by freeing thought from that with which only the means of expression of ordinary language, constituted as they are, saddle it, then my ideography, further developed for these purposes, can become a useful tool for the philosopher.⁵⁸

On Diamond's reading, Fregean remarks like the one expressing the distinction between concepts and objects are what we might call 'transitional'.⁵⁹ The purpose of these remarks is 'to lead us *into* the *Begriffsschrift*, to begin operating within its parameters'.⁶⁰ Once this transition has taken place, however, such remarks will have 'no place in the philosophical vocabulary because [...] there is no work' left for them to do.⁶¹ It is at this point that Diamond makes the connection between Frege and Wittgenstein:

We can then look at some of Frege's logical work as providing replacements for certain parts of the philosophical vocabulary, in particular, predicates like "function," "concept," "relation." These are replaced by features of a notation designed to make logical similarities and differences clear. For Wittgenstein the provision of replacements for terms in the philosophical vocabulary is not an incidental achievement but a principle aim, and, more important, it is the *whole* philosophical vocabulary which is to be replaced, including that of the *Tractatus* itself.⁶²

The connections – and differences – which Diamond wants to highlight between Wittgenstein and Frege can be brought more clearly into focus by turning to the *Tractatus* itself. At *Tractatus* 4.002, Wittgenstein writes: 'Language disguises the thought; so that from the external form of the clothes one cannot infer the form of the thought they clothe, because the external form of the clothes is constructed with quite another object than to let the form of the body be recognized.' The point being made here is not that ordinary language is in some way deficient – in the sense that it stands in need of logical improvement in order to express thoughts more precisely.⁶³ Rather, it is that ordinary language fails to adequately reflect its own logical structure. Specifically, the problem can be seen in the fact that ordinary language allows the same *sign* to symbolize in different ways, and the same *symbol* to be expressed by different signs.⁶⁴ Wittgenstein refers to this as the type of confusion 'of which the whole of philosophy is full' (3.324). In the *Tractatus*, he expresses the problem in the following way:

In the language of everyday life it very often happens that the same word signifies in two different ways – and therefore belongs to two different symbols – or that two words, which signify in different ways, are apparently applied in the same way in the proposition.

Thus the word "is" appears as the copula, as the sign of equality, and as the expression of existence; "to exist" as an intransitive verb like "to go"; "identical" as an adjective; we speak of *something* but also of the fact of *something* happening.

(In the proposition "Green is green" – where the first word is a proper name and the last an adjective – these words have not merely different meanings but they are *different symbols*.)

Thus there easily arise the most fundamental confusions.

(3.323, 3.324)

In the section that follows, Wittgenstein suggests a way in which these 'fundamental confusions' can be avoided. 'In order to avoid these errors,' he remarks, 'we must employ a symbolism which excludes them, by not applying the same sign in different symbols and by not applying signs in the same way which signify in different ways. A symbolism, that is to say, which obeys the rules of *logical* grammar – of logical syntax' (3.325). Here Wittgenstein argues for the application of a *perspicuous notation*. Through the employment of this type of notation it is possible for sentences to be rewritten in such a way that their logical relations are made clearly visible. In one sense, this strategy is strikingly similar to Frege's: it advocates a symbolism in which there is a perfect correspondence between the structure of the sentence and the structure of what is expressed by it.⁶⁵ However, unlike Frege, Wittgenstein does not lay down the foundations for a new language. Rather, in the *Tractatus*, translating sentences into a perspicuous notation is an *elucidatory activity* which allows us to see what (if anything) we are saying when we use certain words. For Wittgenstein, 'the employment of such notation does not itself constitute part of a doctrine,'⁶⁶ but instead serves the purpose of leading us back to ordinary, everyday language. As Diamond observes:

What Wittgenstein wants to do is then to describe a way of writing sentences, a way of translating ordinary sentences into a completely perspicuous form [...] But once the transition is made, the analyzed sentences must in a sense speak for themselves [...] *We are left using ordinary sentences*, and [at this point] [w]e shall genuinely have thrown the ladder away.⁶⁷

At the end of the *Tractatus* then, on the Diamondian reading, we thus remain firmly within the context of ordinary language. The logical

symbolism, which the early Wittgenstein inherits from Frege, becomes a *clarificatory-therapeutic tool* – one which allows us to identify and discard the various nonsensical strings of signs that we are wont to call ‘philosophical propositions.’⁶⁸

Varieties of resolutism and the meaning of *dialectic*

As I indicated earlier on in this chapter, anti-metaphysical readers – or, following Diamond, resolute readers – are not concerned to put forward a *definitive* interpretation of the *Tractatus*; rather, as Warren Goldfarb has observed with regards to Diamond’s work:

[What she has] articulated [is] a program for interpreting the text. That is not yet to interpret the text. An actual resolute interpretation of the text will involve the working-out of *how* the interrogation of its pronouncements goes, of what processes – what demands placed on the notions – lead us to the recognition that those pronouncements are nonsense. It must be done case by case. In short, the idea of a resolute reading is programmatic, and our understanding of its results depends entirely on the execution of the program.⁶⁹

Within the general framework of resolutism, there are thus a variety of positions which individual interpreters might take up. In recent exegetical work, an internal division has emerged between so-called ‘Girondist’ and ‘Jacobin’ readers⁷⁰ – or, as Rupert Read has phrased it, between weak and strong versions of resolutism.⁷¹ At the centre of this dispute is a conflict over the status of Wittgenstein’s perspicuous notation (*Begriffsschrift*) in the *Tractatus*. Girondists (such as Diamond and Conant) take the view (outlined above) that a ‘transitional’ *Begriffsschrift* is operative in the *Tractatus*, and that this device allows us to see in a more perspicuous manner the underlying logic of our language. Jacobins (such as Juliet Floyd and Rupert Read), by contrast, argue that the very idea of a canonical concept-script is something

which Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus*, is attempting to overcome.⁷² As Floyd remarks:

[W]e imagine ourselves to be depicting *the* inferential order among thoughts (or sentences of our language) when we work with a logical notation [*Begriffsschrift*]. But on my reading one aim of the *Tractatus* is to depict such notions as “the inferential order,” “the logical grammar of language,” and “the logical form of a proposition” as chimeras. In this sense, the Frege (Russell) ideal stands as a primary philosophical target of the *Tractatus*, and not just an ideal Wittgenstein inherited from them.⁷³

The Jacobin approach also denies that there is a clear distinction to be drawn between what Diamond calls the frame of the *Tractatus* (i.e. the Preface and Conclusion) and the body of the text. According to Read and Deans, ‘the separation of “frame” and “body” is just what one finds slipping through one’s fingers as one continues to “work through” the *Tractatus*. The question must arise [...] whether [the framing] remarks [...] are not themselves expressions of a desire to want to say something metaphysical, something that will stand firm, but that actually stands in need of being overcome through elucidation.’⁷⁴ Rejecting frame-body dualism also means, for Read and Deans, rejecting the *concept* of the ladder itself: there is nothing to climb and thus nothing to throw away.⁷⁵ These programmatic commitments underpin what the authors term their austere mono-Wittgensteinianism – an approach which (i) denies that there is a *fundamental* discontinuity between Wittgenstein’s early and later work (though it maintains that ‘progress’ does occur in Wittgenstein’s philosophy); and (ii) aims to move one away from the mere exegesis of the latter’s texts and towards ‘the actual philosophical work of applying Wittgenstein to oneself and one’s [...] world.’⁷⁶

Whilst I am sympathetic with both the spirit and the content of Jacobin approaches – especially Floyd’s point that ‘however useful the formalized languages of Frege and Russell may be for warding off certain grammatical and metaphysical confusions, these languages must simultaneously be seen as sources of new forms of philosophical

illusion [...] indeed the deepest kind of illusion of all, the illusion of having found ultimate clarity⁷⁷ – they can be seen to run up against a number of difficulties. First, to the extent that they advocate a strong mono-Wittgensteinianism, they have struggled, thus far at least, to establish a clear narrative about the development of Wittgenstein's thinking which goes beyond casting it in straightforwardly evolutionary terms.⁷⁸ One possible way of conceptualizing this shift from the early to the later work is, I would argue, in terms of a transition from high to late modernism, where the latter sees itself (although not always correctly) as the former's completion and fulfilment. High modernist works are, in a variety of medium-specific ways, difficult, formally innovative, austere, heroic, agonistic, mythological, concerned with the perfection or the purification of the expressive medium itself and so with 'the extirpation of everything extrinsic to it'.⁷⁹ Late modernist works, by contrast, are what Fredric Jameson has called 'the last survivals of a properly modernist view of art and the world' after the economic and political upheavals of the 1930s and 1940s (Great Depression, Stalinism, World War II, Hiroshima, New Deal⁸⁰). Such works, while still committed to aesthetic innovation and the production of new forms, also suggest ways of moving beyond the aporias and dogmatisms of the earlier mode. As one critic puts it: '[t]he late modernist text [...] turns to the reader [or viewer] a more reserved and diplomatic face than that of the fractious [high] modernist monster'.⁸¹ I will return to this distinction in more detail later on in the study. For now, however, I want to suggest that it provides a framework for mapping the transition from the early to the later Wittgenstein – one which, by registering the impact of a variety of historical, political and cultural forces, does not reduce Wittgenstein's philosophical development to a simple set of voluntaristic, authorial decisions.

A second problem that Jacobin approaches run up against (especially in cases where they are self-naming) is a terminological one. 'Jacobin', 'strong', 'severe', as epithets applied to the resolute reading, would appear to function as code-words for a kind of self-conscious philosophical radicalism. In this respect, Jacobinism exhibits family

resemblances with a strand of deconstructive criticism which claims that the greater the demolition work carried out by a particular reading – the more it succeeds in dissolving all instances of positive textual meaning – the greater its fidelity to the act of interpretation itself.⁸² Here, however, we encounter a paradox. Whilst the so-called ‘severists’ aim to go beyond dualisms within the *Tractatus* (frame/body, for example), they end up unwittingly perpetuating them outside of it: the ‘strong’ versus the ‘weak’ stance, the ‘resolutely resolute’ versus the ‘merely resolute’ approach, or, what amounts to the same, the ‘authentic’ versus the ‘inauthentic’ reading. In the work of Read and Deans, further deconstructionist motifs pile up. The author of the *Tractatus* is (following Roland Barthes) pronounced dead (‘in the end it matters very little what one wise and clever man wrote or thought’⁸³), and the text is re-figured as a free and open space in which the reader can set to work: ‘The *Tractatus* just achieves what it achieves according to the reader’s willingness (and need) to keep on working with it. What then matters is what the reader does with the text.’⁸⁴ This emphasis upon the ‘endless open-ended work’ of reading, gives way finally to its own form of dogmatism: ‘If it [severe mono-Wittgensteinianism] wasn’t what he [Wittgenstein] meant [...] then it is what he *ought* to have said.’⁸⁵ The claim made by Read and Deans that they are *now* ‘doing philosophy aright’ – *finally* moving in the direction that ‘philosophy needs to go’⁸⁶ – brings us back to Paul de Man’s observation (cited in chapter one) that any claim to absolute newness will sooner or later discover its dependence on similar assertions made in the past. In the case of ultra-Jacobinism, the past that continues to speak is the discourse of deconstruction; a discourse that when applied to the *Tractatus* has the consequence of making the work appear *less* radical than it actually is. For if the theory is correct, then *all* texts (at least all ‘writerly’ ones) are aporetic, *all* ultimately deconstruct, *all* outrun and escape the readings which try to contain them, thus meaning that there aren’t necessarily any *unique* therapeutic insights to be gained from engaging with the early Wittgenstein.

Suffice to say, on the schema I set out above (high-late modernism) severe mono-Wittgensteinianism plays too fast and loose with the *Tractatus*, treating it as a kind of proto-postmodern – rather than a high modernist – text. Given this, my own preference is for the phrase *dialectical reading*, where the idea of dialectic is understood in a specific sense. First, it is important to point out that dialectic is not to be equated with sheer negativity or sheer groundlessness. This, we might say, is simply not dialectical enough. Instead, to grasp the essence of dialectic (and therefore to comprehend what a dialectical reading might entail), we need to begin with the tripartite movement of Hegelian dialectic which Jameson neatly summarizes as follows: ‘first impression as the appearance; ingenious correction in the name of some underlying reality or “essence”; but finally, after all, a return to the reality of the appearance.’⁸⁷ In relation to the *Tractatus* (and with some minor adjustments), this might play out in the following way. First impression: the *Tractatus* is putting forward a variety of metaphysical theories concerning language, logic and the constitution of reality. Ingenious correction: the metaphysical theories that we thought made sense are, in fact, simply nonsense, and so must be climbed up and discarded like a ladder. A return to the reality of appearance: having thrown away the ladder, we finally recognize that there can be no *complete* escape from metaphysics (or, more specifically, from what Stanley Cavell calls our ‘craving for the metaphysical’⁸⁸), although we are now (more) able to recognize metaphysical nonsense *as* nonsense. In his later writings, Wittgenstein clearly sums up what this final stage – arriving at an enlightened grasp of our own intellectual restlessness – involves:

Don’t for *heaven’s sake*, be afraid of talking nonsense! Only don’t fail to pay attention to your nonsense.⁸⁹

It should be noted here that this dialectical reading preserves the wholeness of the *Tractatus*, whilst simultaneously recognizing that, once we come to understand the author, rather than the book’s pseudo-propositions, the work cancels itself out. Phrased in a Nietzschean register, we might say that a dialectical reading acknowledges both the Apollonian and the Dionysian dimensions of Wittgenstein’s text.

We should also note that (what Diamond calls) the frame is essential to the dialectical process: it is what allows thought to shift gears and to transcend its earlier 'naïve' position, although it too must be discarded (not clung to fetishistically) as part of any genuine dialectical coming to consciousness. It is left to the reader to decide whether such an approach has more in common with the Girondist or the Jacobin reading, or whether, in fact, it succeeds (at least partially) in synthesizing the two.

No *kinds* of nonsense

In terms of the reading I have been outlining above, one final strand requires clarification. An important corollary of the resolute-dialectical readers' rejection of the idea that the *Tractatus* puts forward doctrines or theories is the rejection of a particular conception of nonsense. According to some of Wittgenstein's traditional exegetes, it is possible to distinguish between different *kinds* of nonsense. P.M.S. Hacker, for instance, draws a distinction between what he terms 'overt' and 'covert' nonsense.⁹⁰ Within the latter category, Hacker argues that it is possible to make a further distinction between, on the one hand, 'misleading nonsense' and, on the other hand, 'illuminating nonsense'. For Hacker, misleading nonsense results from a 'failure to understand the principles of the logical syntax of language', which 'engenders the illusion that one can say things which can only be shown'.⁹¹ Illuminating nonsense similarly violates logical syntax; however, it does so self-consciously in order to bring one to see certain ineffable truths.⁹² In contrast, resolute-dialectical readers argue that, in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein endorses an *austere* conception of nonsense.⁹³ On this conception, there is no such thing as logically distinct kinds of nonsense; rather, all nonsense is simply *plain* nonsense. On the austere view, such nonsense arises *only* because we have failed to give a meaning to certain signs in the sentences that we use; and not, therefore, because any sentence is in itself illegitimately constructed.⁹⁴

We can illustrate this point by turning to the following sections of the *Tractatus*:

Logic must take care of itself.

A *possible* sign must also be able to signify. Everything which is possible in logic is also permitted. ("Socrates is identical" means nothing because there is no property which is called "identical". The proposition is nonsense [*unsinnig*] because we have not made some arbitrary determination, not because the symbol is in itself impermissible.)

In a certain sense we cannot make mistakes in logic [...]

We cannot give a sign the wrong sense [...]

Frege says: Every legitimately constructed proposition must have a sense; and I say: Every possible proposition is legitimately constructed, and if it has no sense this can only be because we have given no *meaning* to some of its constituent parts. (Even if we believe that we have done so.)

Thus "Socrates is identical" says nothing, because we have given *no* meaning to the word "identical" as *adjective*. For when it occurs as the sign of equality it symbolizes in an entirely different way – the symbolizing relation is another – therefore the symbol is in the two cases entirely different; the two symbols have the sign in common with one another only by accident.

(5.473, 5.4732, 5.4733)

In these sections, Wittgenstein rejects the idea that there is such a thing as a logically illegitimately constructed proposition. He argues instead that if a sentence is nonsense, then it is so on account of the fact that we have failed to give a clear meaning to some of its constituent parts. Thus, if we consider the sentence 'Socrates is identical', this sentence says nothing, not because it is logically impermissible, but rather because we have given no *adjectival* meaning to the word 'identical'.⁹⁵ The syntactical structure of the sentence demands that there is some

object that Socrates is identical to; however, as it stands, the sentence suggests no candidate for such an object.

Understanding nonsense in terms of the ambiguity or ill-defined nature of signs, serves to establish a connection between the philosophical task of clarification ('The object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts' (4.112)) and 'the right method of philosophy' as it is outlined at section 6.53 of the *Tractatus*. Here, as Wittgenstein suggests, philosophical activity always begins with the confusion of some 'other'. The task of the practitioner of the correct method is therefore 'to demonstrate [to the other speaker] that he [has] given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions' (6.53). On this view, clarification comes to an end only when the speaker is able to see that his own propositions are nonsense – not because they are illegitimately formulated, but rather because the words used to express them have been given *no meaning*. As Wittgenstein states: 'This method would be unsatisfying to the other – he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy – but it would be the only strictly correct method' (6.53).

Importantly, however, it must be recognized that the 'strictly correct method' is *not* the method being followed by the *Tractatus* itself. In the book, Wittgenstein does not avoid speaking nonsense; on the contrary, he tells the reader that whoever understands him finally recognizes 'them' (the book's propositions) as *pure nonsense*. The question then is *why* Wittgenstein does not himself adhere to the strictly correct method? There are, I think, two clear answers to this question.⁹⁶ First, as Wittgenstein himself observes, the strictly correct method would be 'unsatisfying' to the other (6.53): it would not give intellectual 'pleasure' (*TLP*, p. 29) to the one who was subject to it. Such a method, we might say, suggests a disciplinarian philosophical practice in which the naturally erring subject (the one who, as a user of language, is constantly tempted to transgress the bounds of sense) is forced to endure repeated philosophical correction. Second, there is for Wittgenstein an intimate (epistemological) connection between clarity and error, such that the only illuminating way of arriving at the former

is by first passing through the latter. What we are thus being asked to throw away when we arrive at *Tractatus* 6.54 is the desire for complete clarity conceived along positivist lines: a situation in which we restrict ourselves to uttering only 'the propositions of natural science' (6.53). True clarity, we might venture, involves (amongst other things) recognizing both the (transitional) uses of nonsense and the fact that the urge to speak 'beyond sense' (the threat of illusions) cannot be *completely* overcome. Here we are once again reminded of Cavell's words, when, echoing Kant's Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he speaks of 'the human [...] craving for the metaphysical [...] the essential and implacable restlessness of the human, its distinguished faculty of reason as precisely the faculty that tantalizes itself'.⁹⁷

II.

[W]e cannot say: 'It is a pity that Wittgenstein could not have presented his ideas in something more nearly the accepted philosophical style'. That would not have been a presentation of his philosophical views.

Rush Rhees⁹⁸

Style is the *picture* of the man

The following questions now present themselves. How are we to square the reading of the *Tractatus* outlined above with the remarks which Wittgenstein makes in his letters to von Ficker? What connection is there to be drawn between a book which asks its readers to overcome its own nonsensical sentences and one which the author himself describes as both literary and ethical? One way of approaching these questions will be to look first at the literary dimensions of Wittgenstein's writing and then investigate how the literary is inextricably bound up with the ethical point of view which the *Tractatus* seeks to communicate.

In his essay 'Declining Decline', Cavell observes that many of Wittgenstein's philosophical exegetes have hitherto failed to take seriously the literary and aesthetic qualities of Wittgenstein's work – what Cavell describes as 'the spiritual fervour or seriousness of his writing'.⁹⁹ This lack of attention appears somewhat curious given that, throughout his philosophical career, Wittgenstein places clear emphasis on the literary character of what he has to say. As early as the wartime *Notebooks*, Wittgenstein describes his problem as one of finding the right form of expression for his thoughts. For instance, in a remark recorded on 8 March 1915, he writes: 'My difficulty is only an – enormous – difficulty of expression.'¹⁰⁰ The idea of expression and style as internal to the activity of philosophy is a recurrent theme in Wittgenstein's work. In a section of his later manuscripts, he observes that '[w]riting the right style means, setting the carriage precisely on the rails.'¹⁰¹ In another passage, he draws attention to the contrast between the two phrases: 'Le style c'est l'homme' and 'Le style c'est l'homme même'. 'The first expression,' Wittgenstein remarks, 'has a cheap epigrammatic brevity. The second, correct, one opens up a quite different perspective. It says that style is the *picture* of the man.'¹⁰² Here, as Cavell points out, Wittgenstein re-connects with his own insight from *Philosophical Investigations* which states that '[t]he human body is the best picture of the human soul.'¹⁰³ Linking these statements together, Cavell argues: 'Prompted by Wittgenstein's reading of style as picturing the very man, I take his idea of the body's picturing to declare that his writing is (of) his body, that it is on the line, that his hand is in the manner of his text.'¹⁰⁴

In the *Tractatus*, the emphasis which Wittgenstein places on expression and style leads a number of early commentators to remark upon the literary and aesthetic character of the work as a whole. Speaking about the presentation of the text in his translator's note, C.K. Ogden writes:

In rendering Mr Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* available for English readers, the somewhat unusual course has been adopted of printing the original side by side with the

translation. Such a method of presentation seemed desirable both on account of the obvious difficulties raised by the vocabulary and in view of the *peculiar literary character* of the whole.

(*TLP*, p. 5)¹⁰⁵

The peculiar literary character of the *Tractatus* is also acknowledged by Frege. On receipt of the *Tractatus* manuscript, Frege found himself baffled by the nature of the work's content. Writing in a letter to Wittgenstein on 28 June 1919, he thus comments: 'I am entangled from the very beginning in doubts about what you mean to say, and thus I make no progress.'¹⁰⁶ Frege's concern was not only with the philosophical details of the *Tractatus*, but also with Wittgenstein's claim, made in the Preface, that the book would only be understood if the reader had 'already thought the thoughts expressed in it'; and consequently that '[i]ts object would be attained if it afforded pleasure to one who read it with understanding' (*TLP*, p. 27). Frege's response to these remarks is given in a letter to Wittgenstein dated 16 September 1919:

The pleasure of reading your book can therefore in no way arise through the already known content, but, rather, only through the form, in which is revealed something of the individuality of the author. Thereby the book becomes an artistic rather than a scientific achievement; that which is said therein takes a back seat to how it is said. I proceeded in my remarks from the assumption that you wanted to communicate a new content. And then the greatest clarity would indeed be the greatest beauty.¹⁰⁷

As Juliet Floyd has noted, Frege, in the above letter, proves himself to be 'an acute, though unsympathetic reader of the *Tractatus*.'¹⁰⁸ Whilst he is insightful enough to note the artistic achievement of Wittgenstein's work, he cannot help but read the book in accordance with his own clear-cut analytic distinction between science and aesthetics, philosophy and literature. It is, however, precisely this strict separation of the philosophical and the literary that the *Tractatus* seeks to challenge.

Deceiving the reader into clarity

To understand the way in which the *Tractatus* challenges the separation of the philosophical and the literary (and then to grasp how the literary and the ethical interconnect), it will be necessary to look at how the book's *form* works alongside its overall aim of getting the reader to 'see the world aright' (6.54).¹⁰⁹ As Brian McGuinness points out, it is a 'characteristic piece of irony' that despite Wittgenstein's warning in the Preface that the book is 'not a text-book' [*kein Lehrbuch*], it 'is in fact written and arranged' *exactly* 'like a textbook'.¹¹⁰ The strict numbering system of the sentences imitates 'the logical ordering of *Principia Mathematica* (and in general that of any treatise arranged on mathematical or Euclidean lines)'.¹¹¹ Moreover, the numbering 'provides a measure of progress and colours the book as a whole with the sense of linear progress'.¹¹² This principle of arrangement is, however, explicitly undermined at the end of the book, when the reader is called upon by the author to throw away its sentences because they are nonsensical. Whilst the formal structure of the *Tractatus* therefore invites the reader to think that he or she is making philosophical progress by climbing the propositional ladder, in the end such progress turns out to be an illusion. Indeed, rather than advocating any type of philosophical advancement, the book aspires instead to bring about a wholesale transformation in the outlook of the reader.

An essential part of the *Tractatus*' literary character thus resides in the fact that, through its very form, the book attempts to *deceive* the reader into philosophical clarity – a strategy which involves getting the reader to take up a variety of apparently meaningful philosophical perspectives, only to expose them, in the book's penultimate section, as empty. Here there are clear parallels to be drawn between Wittgenstein's literary-dialectical method and the one employed by Kierkegaard in his pseudonymous works.¹¹³ In *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard argues that 'an illusion can never be destroyed directly'; rather, if one wishes to dispel an illusion then 'one must approach from behind the person who is under an illusion'.¹¹⁴ This

mode of pseudonymous authorship is, for Kierkegaard, an activity of 'instruction' which operates by way of 'deception'. As he writes: 'One can deceive a person for the truth's sake, and (to recall old Socrates) one can deceive a person into truth. Indeed, it is only by this means, i.e. by deceiving him, that it is possible to bring into truth one who is in an illusion.'¹¹⁵ In the *Tractatus*, similarly, confusion and clarity, illusion and illumination are intimately connected. This relationship is neatly summarized by Wittgenstein in a passage in his 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*':

One must start out with error and convert it into truth. That is, one must reveal the source of error, otherwise hearing the truth won't do any good. The truth cannot force its way in when something else is occupying its place. To convince someone of the truth, it is not enough to state it, but rather one must find the *path* from error to truth.¹¹⁶

Describing the dramatic way in which the *Tractatus* attempts to lead the reader from error to truth, Diamond argues that Wittgenstein *imagines himself* into the position of someone who speaks nonsense and, in so doing, entices them to follow him.¹¹⁷ Having entered into the reader's imagination, Wittgenstein's method is then to round on her, 'shocking [her]', as Floyd puts it, 'into a reassessment of the indefiniteness of [her] own thinking.'¹¹⁸ In this respect, Wittgenstein can be seen to act like a *mirror* in which readers see their 'own thinking with all its deformities and with this assistance can set it in order.'¹¹⁹ Thus understood, the literary significance of the *Tractatus* is clearly brought out: the book does not simply operate intellectually, it also strikes an emotional blow – presenting an elaborate picture of the reader's own philosophical desires before eventually turning them in on themselves. Wittgenstein's aim, in this respect, is 'not to expound but to sting'.¹²⁰ He does not try to *prove* to someone that they are speaking nonsense, but rather attempts to enter into their nonsense in order to use nonsense dialectically against itself. The importance of this strategy is highlighted again by Wittgenstein, ten years after the publication of the *Tractatus*, in a revealing passage in the 'Big Typescript':

One of the most important tasks [of philosophy] is to express all false thought processes so characteristically that the reader says, "Yes, that's exactly the way I meant it". To make a tracing of the physiognomy of every error.

Indeed we can only convict someone else of a mistake if he acknowledges that this really is the expression of his feeling [...] if he (really) acknowledges this expression as the correct expression of his feeling.¹²¹

It will be instructive here to say a little more about Wittgenstein's use of the tactic of 'shock' at the end of the *Tractatus*. In his 1939 essay on Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin defines shock as the ubiquitous sensation of modern metropolitan life. For Benjamin, shock-experience [*Chockerlebnis*] is written into the very fabric of the capitalist everyday: it is what the worker experiences at his or her machine and what the passer-by endures when moving through the city crowd:

Moving through [the] traffic involves the individual in a series of shocks and collisions. At dangerous intersections, nervous impulses flow through him in rapid succession, like the energy from a battery. Baudelaire speaks of a man who plunges into the crowd as into a reservoir of electric energy. Circumscribing the experience of the shock, he calls this man 'a *kaleidoscope* equipped with consciousness.' Whereas Poe's passers-by cast glances in all directions which still appeared to be aimless, today's pedestrians are obliged to do so in order to keep abreast of traffic signals. Thus technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training.¹²²

For Benjamin, however, shock is genuinely dialectical. Whilst it is, in one respect, intimately tied to alienation and the impoverishment of experience, it can, at the same time, be used mimetically against itself as part of a 'technique of awakening' [*Technik des Erwachens*].¹²³ So, for example, the sporadic image sequences that one encounters in film or the snapping of the camera's shutter after the illumination of its flashbulb, can have the effect of jolting the individuals' consciousness,

preventing her from lapsing into habitual modes of thinking and seeing. In his own unfinished late work, the *Arcades Project* [*Passagen-Werk*], Benjamin reproduces the shock character of the modern through the method of literary montage. His ‘constellatory’ arrangement of quotations (loosely assembled around a number of keywords: Arcades, Fashion, Boredom, Collector, Interior, Baudelaire, Marx) function as a sequence of electrical blasts or mechanical detonations designed to shock the reader into a state of ‘awakened consciousness’¹²⁴. Crucially, for Benjamin, one must not merely awake (from what he describes as the ‘dream world’ of commodity capitalism), but rather *in the process of waking-up* come to grasp the vital distinction between dreaming and awakening: ‘The realization of the dream elements in the course of waking up is the canon of dialectics.’¹²⁵

Here we can find an important link between Benjamin and the early Wittgenstein. The *Tractatus*, for the most part, is written in a dense and almost authorless style. The ideas are presented not as an option to the reader – not, that is, as things which can be argued for or against – but rather as a set of (deceptively) unquestionable statements. For instance, the book opens with the following pronouncements:

The world is everything that is the case.

The world is the totality of facts, not of things.

The world is determined by the facts, and by these being all the facts.

For the totality of facts determines both what is the case, and also all that is not the case.

(1–1.12)

The terse and intimidating style of these remarks is, however, opposed by the use of the first-person in the penultimate section: ‘My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands *me* finally recognizes them as nonsense’ (6.54). Here the shift in register allows Wittgenstein to break through the barrier of theoretical anonymity and to address the reader directly. The word ‘nonsense’ [*unsinnig*] arrives at this point in the *Tractatus* like a Benjaminian lightning flash,¹²⁶ startling the reader

into a state of philosophical wakefulness. The immediate effect is akin to a sudden drop in altitude, bringing feelings of groundlessness and anxiety. The point, though, is not simply that (following Wittgenstein's direction) we discard the nonsensical sentences, but rather that *in the process of discarding* we arrive at a new threshold: the picture which has been holding us captive is still vivid, but we now recognize it as a *deceptive* picture, and as one that dialectically opens the door to a new way of seeing our own philosophical desires.

Philosophy and poetry

In his manuscripts of 1933, Wittgenstein makes the following remark about the relation between philosophy and literature:

[Ich glaube meine Stellung zur Philosophie dadurch zusammengefaßt zu haben, indem ich sagte: Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur *dichten*.]

I think I summed up my attitude to philosophy when I said: philosophy ought really to be written only as a *poetic composition*.¹²⁷

How should one read this enigmatic remark? First, it is important to consider Wittgenstein's use of the verb *dichten* in his original statement. *Dichten* is the German verb meaning 'to write verse' or 'to write poems'. Thus what Wittgenstein appears to be saying (in a way that is perhaps not fully captured by Peter Winch's translation above), is 'that the *activities* of writing philosophy and writing poetry are closely related: to philosophize is to poetize – one should write philosophy only ['*nur*'] as one would write poetry; philosophy should be nothing other than the writing of poetry'.¹²⁸

This call for a union between work in philosophy and work in poetry places Wittgenstein's writing in a tradition of debates stretching back to the ancient Greeks. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates insists upon a strict division between philosophy and poetry, famously calling for poets and dramatists to be banished from the just city.¹²⁹ For Socrates, poetry 'is by

nature at third remove from the throne of truth'; it bypasses reasoned argument and instead 'wakens and encourages and strengthens the lower elements in the mind'; it demonstrates no knowledge of the things which it depicts, for if it did it 'would devote [itself] to them and not to their representations'; and poets themselves are afflicted by vanity, 'more anxious to be praised [...] than to write in praise of others'.¹³⁰ As such, poetry 'has a terrible power to corrupt even the best characters, with very few exceptions'.¹³¹ And yet, there is a clear contradiction between the *content* of Socrates' pronouncements and their *form*. As Stephen Mulhall writes: 'the Socrates of the *Republic* and elsewhere is not only willing to, but adept in, employing striking quasi-poetic imagery in conveying his message of the superiority of philosophy to literature'.¹³² The medium which Plato uses to present Socrates' ideas is also that of the dialogue: a dramatic form which invites the reader (along with the various speakers) into the philosophical process, encouraging one to actively produce (rather than passively consume) the work's meaning. In this respect, rather than reading Socrates as simply calling for poetry (and drama) to be excluded from his ideal state, we might instead take his remarks 'as a revealing indication that poetry is always already internal to the precincts of philosophy's republic'.¹³³

That poetry is a vital resource for philosophy is a point clearly illustrated again, in the nineteenth century, in the work of two figures who both had a significant influence upon Wittgenstein's thinking: Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. For Kierkegaard (whose work we have already touched upon above), the individual is faced with the task of making the transition from 'personal being' (the everyday self) to true inwardness and authentic subjectivity.¹³⁴ For the philosophical author, however, this poses a specific problem: how does one write a book which avoids telling the reader *how* to think and *how* to act and instead sends him or her on the difficult journey towards *becoming a self*¹³⁵ – an 'I' in the 'deeper sense', as Kierkegaard puts it?¹³⁶ Kierkegaard finds a solution to this problem in the *mode of presentation* itself, and, more specifically, in what he calls 'pseudonymity' or 'polynymity'. In 'A First

and Last Explanation' (a text added to the end of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* in Kierkegaard's own name), he writes of this authorial strategy as follows:

My pseudonymity or polynimity has not had an *accidental* basis in my *person* [...] but an *essential* basis in the *production* itself [...]. What has been written, then, is mine, but only insofar as I, by means of audible lines, have placed the life-view of the creating, poetically actual individuality in his mouth, for my relation is even more remote than that of a poet, who *poetizes* characters and yet in the preface is *himself* the *author*. That is, I am impersonally or personally in the third person a *souffleur* [prompter] who has poetically produced the *authors*, whose prefaces in turn are their productions, as their *names* are also. Thus in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me. I have no opinion about them except as a third party, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them, since it is impossible to have that to a doubly reflected communication.¹³⁷

In a pseudonymous work such as *Fear and Trembling*, then, Kierkegaard does not step forward in the first person to express any opinions of his own; rather, he 'poetically' produces the book's author, Johannes de Silentio, who is himself 'a poetic person who exists only among poets'.¹³⁸ Having a poet (who also characterizes himself as a 'Knight of Faith' and a 'Knight of Infinite Resignation') discuss the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac (in a work subtitled 'Dialectical Lyric') serves a number of interrelated purposes. First, it makes the point that religious faith is not something that can be captured in a body of doctrine (and is not, therefore, a problem *for philosophy*); second, because religious truth is not given as part of a *system* of thought – indeed, as Johannes puts it, 'faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off'¹³⁹ – it forces the reader to make a subjective 'leap' and find the *truth that is true for them*; and third, to the extent that the book is concerned with Johannes's struggle to relate himself to Abraham, the former can figure as an *exemplary other*, encouraging us to cultivate, like him, multiple poetic perspectives

which can in turn lead to new forms of critical reflection upon our aesthetic, ethical and religious forms of life.

Nietzsche's writings – like those of Kierkegaard – bring traditional philosophical practice into question. Boris Groys describes both authors as 'antiphilosophers', or 'readymade philosophers, by analogy with the readymade artists' of the early twentieth-century.¹⁴⁰ According to Groys, '[a]ntiphilosophy does not produce any conventionally identifiable philosophical texts, but instructs us how to change our mind in such a way that certain practices, discourses and experiences [...] become universally evident'.¹⁴¹ Nietzsche's challenge to the deceptive power of conventional philosophizing is undertaken most explicitly at the level of style: in the tempo, texture and rhythm of his language. In *Ecce Homo*, he speaks of his 'art of style', which demonstrates the extent to which his writing is inseparable from poetry:

To *communicate* a state, an inner tension of pathos through signs, including the tempo of these signs – that is the meaning of every style [...] Every style is *good* which actually communicates an inner state, which makes no mistake as to the signs, the tempo of the signs, the *gestures* – all rules of phrasing are art of gesture [...] The art of *grand* rhythm, the *grand style* of phrasing, as the expression of a tremendous rise and fall of sublime, of superhuman passion, was first discovered by me.¹⁴²

When Nietzsche writes that poetry 'effectuates a certain artificiality of speech and unclarity of thinking' he is in full agreement with Socrates in the *Republic*; however, for the former, it is precisely by laying 'the veil of unclear thinking' over reality that poetry 'makes the sight of life bearable'.¹⁴³ For Nietzsche, this kind of artistic 'illusion' is 'a necessity of life for a sensate being'; it is 'necessary for the advance of culture'.¹⁴⁴ This is because poetry and art are opposed to, and the means by which we master, modernity's 'knowledge drive', which is hostile to culture and eliminates 'everything miraculous, everything creative, from human development'.¹⁴⁵ Faced with the question 'is philosophy an art or a science?' Nietzsche's response is thus clear: '[b]oth in its purposes and

its results [philosophy] is an art'. Whilst philosophy uses the same means as science – conceptual representation – it is essentially a form of poetic artistry [*Dichtkunst*].¹⁴⁶ As such, its value 'does not lie in the sphere of knowledge, but in that of *life*'.¹⁴⁷

Returning, then, to Wittgenstein's original remark ('philosophy ought really to be written only as a *poetic composition*'), how might this statement be read – in relation to both Wittgenstein's own philosophy and the tradition of aesthetic philosophizing just outlined? In the context of the reading of the *Tractatus* provided thus far, I would suggest that its significance can be understood in the following way. Wittgenstein's writing is part of a struggle to find forms of expression which lead thought 'to the correct track'.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, as in the literary or poetic work, Wittgenstein's style of philosophizing requires a meticulous attention to the choice of words used. Because the point is to 'hit upon the physiognomy of the thing exactly',¹⁴⁹ what is said and the manner in which it is expressed are of vital importance. In the *Tractatus*, the poetic quality of the writing is evident not only in the epigrammatic style of the sentences themselves, but also, and more importantly, in the way in which every word makes a vital contribution to the whole. The writing, as it stands, is perfectly complete – in it nothing is superfluous nor is there anything missing. In this sense, like a poem, the *Tractatus*' point can only be grasped if the book is read and understood *as a whole*. Just as a poem does not admit of paraphrase, so too we cannot replace a word or sentence in Wittgenstein's work without altering (and potentially diminishing) its overall effect. Following Alain Badiou, we might call this the 'Mallarméan side' of Wittgenstein (the side of him concerned with precision, syntax and structure), which links the *Tractatus* to a work such as Mallarmé's *A Throw of the Dice*.¹⁵⁰

At the same time, however, we can discern another aspect of Wittgenstein's philo-poetic practice in the *Tractatus*. This aspect, which has clear affinities with the work of Rimbaud and Rilke, is directed towards getting the reader to see that 'you have to change your *life*'.¹⁵¹ In a later lecture on aesthetics, Wittgenstein describes what he is doing in

philosophy as ‘persuading people to change their style of thinking’.¹⁵² He also writes: ‘If, rather than a more correct way of thinking, I want to teach a new movement of thought, my purpose is a “re-evaluation of values,” and [with this] I come to Nietzsche as well as to the opinion that the philosopher should be a poet’.¹⁵³ This new movement of thought is intimately connected to the desire for a new philosophical method: one that will change how the reader conceptualizes her life with language. Like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Wittgenstein recognizes that bringing about such a *Gestalt* switch will involve not a prescribed set of philosophical directives, but rather a specific *art of writing*. In the case of the *Tractatus*, this art emerges as a revolutionary *poetics of discarding*: ‘he who understands me finally recognizes [the book’s propositions] as nonsense [...] (He must so to speak *throw away the ladder*, after he has climbed up on it)’ (6.54).¹⁵⁴

Towards ethics

If the aim of *Tractatus*’ literary strategy is to bring the reader to see the nonsensicality of its own sentences, then the following idea must be clear: the book’s ethical point will not be found in anything like a conventional *theory* of ethics. Indeed, as Wittgenstein makes clear in his letter to von Ficker, we cannot look for the ethical in anything that is ‘written’ in the *Tractatus*. The challenge for the reader is thus to explain how a book which is silent about ethics can, at the same time, communicate an ethical point.

For one group of Wittgenstein’s interpreters, the relation between the ethical point of the *Tractatus* and the book’s silence *about* ethics maps directly on to the distinction between saying and showing. As Wittgenstein’s friend Paul Engelmann writes, outlining Wittgenstein’s distance from positivist thinkers such as Carnap and Schlick:

A whole generation of disciples was able to take Wittgenstein for a positivist because he has something of enormous importance in

common with the positivists: he draws the line between what we can speak about and what we must be silent about just as they do. The difference is only that they have nothing to be silent about. Positivism holds – and this is its essence – that what we can speak about is all that matters in life. *Whereas Wittgenstein passionately believes that all that really matters in human life is precisely what, in his view, we must be silent about.*¹⁵⁵

For Engelmann, then, the ethical point of view which the *Tractatus* encourages us to adopt (the one which involves coming to 'see the world rightly' (6.54)) is the perspective of mysticism. Wittgenstein's 'mystical conclusions' are, according to Engelmann, suggested in remarks such as the following: 'The sense of the world must lie outside the world' (6.41); 'Not how the world is, is the mystical, but that it is' (6.44); 'The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling' (6.45); 'There is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical' (6.522). Engelmann's view that the ethical 'significance of the book' consists in it 'having established the irrefutable separation between the higher sphere, which exists, and its expression, which is problematic,'¹⁵⁶ echoes Russell's point in his Introduction to the *Tractatus*: 'More interesting than [...] questions of comparative detail is Mr Wittgenstein's attitude towards the mystical. [...] The whole subject of ethics, for example, is placed by Mr Wittgenstein in the mystical, inexpressible region. Nevertheless he is capable of conveying his ethical opinions [...] [W]hat he calls the mystical can be shown, although it cannot be said' (*TLP*, pp. 21–2).¹⁵⁷

Here, as a point of biographical detail, we should note that in a letter to Engelmann (8 May 1920) Wittgenstein says that '[Russell's Introduction] 'has brewed up a mixture with which I don't agree.'¹⁵⁸ Although Wittgenstein does not refer specifically in his letter to Russell's comments on ethics and mysticism, this is precisely the issue to which he turns in his 1929 'Lecture on Ethics'. In this talk, delivered to the Heretics Society in Cambridge, Wittgenstein focuses his attention on the (mystical) 'experience' he calls '*wonder[ing] at the existence of the world*'. Of this experience, he comments:

[W]hen I have [this experience] I am then inclined to use such phrases as “how extraordinary that anything should exist” or “how extraordinary that the world should exist.” [...] [T]he first thing I have to say is, that the verbal expression which we give to these experiences is nonsense! If I say “I wonder at the existence of the world” I am misusing language. [...] [I]t is nonsense to say that I wonder at the existence of the world, because I cannot imagine it not existing.¹⁵⁹

These remarks, I would argue, explicitly *say* what a dialectical reading of the *Tractatus* brings us to *see* regarding the ethico-mystical. The book’s so-called mystical sentences serve as examples of the kinds of things we feel *inclined* to say (or to agree with) in certain *philosophical moods*: they are *captivating*; and all the more so because they appear to be communicating *profound* truths. Ultimately, however, we must come to recognize remarks such as ‘[t]he feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling’ (6.45) or ‘[t]here is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical’ (6.522) as nonsensical; indeed, as Wittgenstein puts it (in the later lecture) ‘their nonsensicality [is] their very essence.’¹⁶⁰ On this view, the problem with readings (such as those suggested by Engelmann and Russell) which see the *Tractatus* as underpinned by mystical concerns, is that they overlook the dialectical and literary qualities of Wittgenstein’s writing. By taking the mystical sentences at face value, they fail to grasp the full significance of the author’s poetics of discarding (6.54).

In an essay entitled “The Problem of “The Higher” in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*”, Piergiorgio Donatelli provides a more philosophically compelling account of the book’s ethical purpose. According to Donatelli, ‘[t]here is nothing in language that shows our ethical involvement with things’; consequently, the ethical ‘is not something we have to look for *in* the proposition or *beside* the proposition [...] but in *our* involvement with propositions.’¹⁶¹ As Donatelli continues: ‘if we overcome the temptation to look for the mark of the ethical in language itself, then the idea of drawing the contrast between the ethical and the non-ethical will appear as something which is always dependent upon

our being able to distinguish sense from nonsense. It will cease to seem to be a contrast that can be drawn within the realm of sense, because it does not concern language, but it concerns *us* and our possible intentions in wanting to reach for certain words.¹⁶² For Donatelli, coming to see the ethical point of the *Tractatus* is thus intimately connected to the activity of distinguishing between sense and nonsense. This activity, he argues, involves 'an effort of will and imagination', an effort to overcome our attachment to certain captivating forms of words.¹⁶³ Wittgenstein himself gives expression to this idea in a passage in his writings from the 1930s:

As I have often said, philosophy does not lead me to any renunciation, since I do not abstain from saying something, but rather abandon a certain combination of words as senseless [...]
What has to be overcome is not a difficulty of the intellect, but of the will.¹⁶⁴

For Wittgenstein, then, it is not intellection, but rather a wholesale attitudinal change which leads to the solution of philosophical problems; and, according to Donatelli, 'it is *this* kind of liberation from a problem, this change in ourselves, that counts as ethical according to the *Tractatus*'.¹⁶⁵ In this respect, the *Tractatus*' ethical point is not something which we can locate inside or outside the book; it is neither in the presence nor in the absence of ethical vocabulary. Rather, it is linked to the transformation in our self-understanding which is brought about through our engagement with the book as a whole.

Connecting the ethical point of the *Tractatus* to the activity of self-understanding is, I would contend, a convincing interpretive strategy and one which fits neatly with Wittgenstein's therapeutic claim that 'philosophy [...] is really more a working on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's way of seeing things.'¹⁶⁶ Such a reading avoids the problems inherent in both mystical and positivist interpretations of the *Tractatus*' treatment of ethics,¹⁶⁷ at the same time as it underlines the point that, for Wittgenstein, ethics is not 'a logically separable

domain or concern of human existence [...] but rather a pervasive dimension of life'.¹⁶⁸

What needs to be added to Donatelli's analysis, however, is an emphasis upon the deep unity of the ethical and the literary dimensions of Wittgenstein's text. The work's peculiar literary character – the stylistic impersonality of the early sections, giving way to a more lyrical tone in the sections 6s, and then, finally, the 'shock' of the author's poetics of discarding (6.54) – is what leads the reader into accepting its metaphysical claims, and then prompts her into the ethical activity of overcoming them. In this sense, only by engaging with the *Tractatus* as an *act of writing* – only by opening ourselves up to the dialectical subtleties of Wittgenstein's authorship – do we finally come to see it as a work which aims to transform our understanding of 'the problems of life' (6.52, 6.521).

This intimate connection between the ethical and the literary is touched upon by Wittgenstein in a 1917 letter to Engelmann. Writing to Engelmann about Ludwig Uhland's poem 'Graf Eberhards Weissdorn',¹⁶⁹ Wittgenstein remarks: 'The poem by Uhland is really magnificent. And this is how it is: if only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then *nothing* gets lost. But the unutterable will be – unutterably – *contained* in what has been uttered!'¹⁷⁰ Wittgenstein's suggestion here, as Michael Kremer argues, is that the poem communicates an ethical point.¹⁷¹ Paradoxically, however, this ethical point is dependent upon the fact that the poem does not try to utter anything which might count as an ethical proposition. Rather, by demonstrating a unity of emotion and expression, form and content, its ethical point is communicated through the *character* of the poem itself. In this sense, it is possible to speak of the poem as imaginatively representing a certain (ethical) mode of life, whilst, at the same time, abstaining from any explicit talk *about* ethics. If we read Uhland's poem in this way, then its connection with the *Tractatus* becomes clear: neither text contains anything explicitly ethical, but it is this 'absence of the ethical'¹⁷² which the reader is invited to respond to. What counts as a response, in this case, will be looking at and engaging with the picture of life which these texts put forward; and

it is through this process of engagement that the reader brings about a transformation of her self-understanding.

In conclusion, I would like to make a final point about the transformation of the understanding which the *Tractatus* aims to effect. This transformation is *practical* rather than cognitive – that is, it relates to what we say and how we act rather than simply what we think. As Wittgenstein puts it in a remark recorded by Rush Rhees: 'I don't try to make you *believe* something you *don't* believe, but to make you *do* something you won't do.'¹⁷³ This understanding of philosophy as an activity (4.112) might strike us as somewhat strange and unsatisfying, given that it goes very much against the grain of traditional philosophizing. Wittgenstein's point, however, is that this process of *doing* can be infinitely rewarding. For in climbing our way 'out through,' 'on' and 'over' the book's sentences (6.54), we are finally able to move from latent to patent nonsense.¹⁷⁴ Such a move does not, of course, bring metaphysical thinking to an end; rather, it transforms our thinking about language, enabling us to see certain forms of words under a changed aspect.

One overall problem with this view, however, is that it appears to run up against a kind of high modernist impasse. On the one hand, by connecting ethical self-understanding to the practical activity of seeking linguistic clarity, the *Tractatus* can be read as an implicit critique of a social world increasingly characterized by the degradation and commodification of words. On the other hand, by staking its ethical project upon the ability of *individual readers* to understand its dialectical form-content relation, the book can be seen to sever its ties from the social and thus to problematize its capacity to speak out against that which it opposes. Like the modernist work of art defined by Adorno, the *Tractatus* offers *itself* as a solution to the riddle of how to live; and this has at least two important consequences for the issue of self-understanding. First, the book restricts this form of enlightenment to the few, to those individuals who, like the author, have the intellect and strength of 'will' to climb up and then to kick away the ladder. Second, by depicting the overcoming of philosophical problems as an individual task – one that is bound up

with the activity of interpreting the book – the *Tractatus* overlooks the historical and social situatedness of such problems, and thus risks intensifying the very confusions which its authorial strategy aims to dissolve.

It is a telling comment upon the early work that in his later writings Wittgenstein seeks to move away from this individualistic and asocial conception of how philosophical problems could and should be solved. As he puts it in a revealing passage in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, a change in our mode of (philosophical) thinking must go hand in hand with a change in our (social) mode of life:

The sickness of a time is cured by an alteration in the mode of life of human beings, and it [is] possible for the sickness of philosophical problems to get cured only through a changed mode of thought and of life, not through a medicine invented by the individual. Think of the use of the motor-car producing or encouraging certain sicknesses, and mankind being plagued by such sickness until, from some cause or other, as the result of some development or other, it abandons the habit of driving.¹⁷⁵

Whilst this chapter has implicitly suggested a deep continuity between the *Tractatus* and the later writings, it is this shift from the individual to the social – a shift which I spoke of earlier in terms of a transition from high to late modernism – which constitutes perhaps the most important *discontinuity* between Wittgenstein's early and later work.

Modernity, Culture and the Question of Politics

The truly apocalyptic view of the world is that things do not repeat themselves. It is not e.g. absurd to believe that the scientific & technological age is the beginning of the end for humanity, that the idea of Great Progress is a bedazzlement, along with the idea that the truth will ultimately be known; that there is nothing good or desirable about scientific knowledge & that humanity, in seeking it, is falling into a trap. It is by no means clear that this is not how things are.

–Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*¹

Stanley Cavell has long argued that Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* is a work which engages with the modern predicament. According to Cavell, the *Investigations* 'may be seen as presenting a philosophy of culture' which responds to the pressures of modernity as directly as the writings of Spengler, Freud, Nietzsche or Emerson.² The work's 'attitude to its times' is, Cavell argues, *internal* to its philosophical teaching³ and is presented as 'a sequence of sketches' that touch upon a variety of interrelated themes: disorientation, loss and (re)turning; the choice between purity (the 'slippery ice') and walking (which requires 'friction') (*PI*, §107); and the rediscovery of childhood for philosophy, which sets in motion ideas of 'inheritance and instruction and of witnessing or fascination'.⁴ In the first part of this chapter, my aim will be to examine the extent to which the *Tractatus* can also be understood in relation to the cultural discourses of its times. Specifically, I will begin by looking at a number of Wittgenstein's remarks on modernity, science and progress, and will argue that these remarks (which appear in his

manuscripts of the 1930s and 1940s) can serve as the basis for a new reading of the ladder metaphor which he employs in the *Tractatus*. In the second part of the chapter, I carry out a reassessment of Wittgenstein's relationship with politics. Here I take a new look at the claim (made by thinkers from both the political left and right) that Wittgenstein is not only personally conservative, but also that there is something *inherently conservative* about his philosophy. Because much of the criticism levelled against Wittgenstein on this topic is directed at *Philosophical Investigations*, it will be the later work that constitutes the primary focus of this section. However, given my contention that there is a strong continuity between the early and the later writings, what I have to say here about the *Investigations* will, as I hope to show, also have significant implications for our political understanding of the *Tractatus*.

I.

A culture in decline?

There is no doubt that Wittgenstein considered himself to be situated outside the dominant currents of modern thought. In conversation with M. O'C. Drury, for instance, he remarks: 'My type of thinking is not wanted in this present age, I have to swim so strongly against the tide. Perhaps in a hundred years people will really want what I am writing.'⁵ Wittgenstein's attitude towards his times is explicitly summed up in a passage in his manuscripts entitled 'Sketch for a Foreword'.⁶ Here he argues that the spirit in which he is writing is 'different from that of the prevailing European and American civilization'.⁷ 'The spirit of this civilization' is, he says, 'a spirit that is alien and uncongenial'.⁸ For Wittgenstein, a defining feature of Western civilization at the beginning of the twentieth century is 'a disappearance of the arts'.⁹ He thus argues that 'what today represents itself as architecture is not architecture'; and that 'what is called modern music' can only be approached with 'the greatest mistrust'.¹⁰ Wittgenstein insists that here he is not making a

‘value judgment’: ‘the disappearance of the arts does not justify judging disparagingly the human beings who make up this civilization.’¹¹ Nevertheless, he claims that his times are ‘without culture’,¹² and he concludes the ‘Sketch’ with the following words:

Even if it is clear to me then that the disappearance of a culture does not signify the disappearance of human value but simply of certain means of expressing this value, still the fact remains that I contemplate the current of European civilization without sympathy, without understanding its aims if any. So I am really writing for friends who are scattered throughout the corners of the globe.¹³

In these passages, Wittgenstein expresses a strong antipathy towards his age. ‘Culture’, the ‘great organization which assigns to each of its members [a] place’, allowing them to ‘work in the spirit of the whole’, has declined, leading to a stage of civilization in which ‘forces are fragmented and the strength of the individual is wasted through the overcoming of opposing forces and frictional resistances’.¹⁴ Such remarks suggest clear affinities with the discourse of *Kulturkritik*. According to Francis Mulhern, *Kulturkritik*, as developed in the early twentieth century in the works of thinkers such as Oswald Spengler, Thomas Mann, Julien Benda and Karl Mannheim, sought to advance an ethico-spiritual critique of mass culture and modern political formations.¹⁵ For this constellation of writers, modernity is seen ‘as degeneration, as the valorisation of the mass, as the paradoxical hyperactivity of essentially inert forces (the “revolt” of the passive “multitude”’, as the decay or contamination of traditional, normally minoritarian values, as the disintegrative advance of high and vulgar enlightenment’.¹⁶ In *The Decline of the West*, Spengler’s thesis is that all human societies must inevitably pass through two stages of spiritual development: culture [*Kultur*] and civilization [*Zivilisation*]. Culture, according to Spengler, is the early spiritual stage of this development: a stage distinguished by creative, artistic and scientific endeavours, which arise out of dynamism and spontaneity. ‘Civilization’, by contrast, ‘is the inevitable *destiny* of the Culture [...] Civilizations are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed

humanity is capable. They are a conclusion, the thing-become succeeding the thing-becoming, death following life [...] They are an end.¹⁷ On Spengler's view, civilization is characterized by, amongst other things, a philistine 'money-spirit' and by a new form of social organization which he calls 'world-city':

In place of a world, there is a *city*, a *point*, in which the whole life of broad regions is collecting while the rest dries up. In place of a type-true people, born of and grown on the soil, there is a new sort of nomad, cohering unstably in fluid masses, the parasitical city dweller, traditionless, utterly matter-of-fact, religionless, clever, unfruitful, deeply contemptuous of the country man [...] The world-city means cosmopolitanism in place of "home" ... To the world-city belongs not a folk but a mob. Its uncomprehending hostility to all the traditions representative of the Culture (nobility, church, privileges, dynasties, convention in art and limits of knowledge in science), the keen and cold intelligence that confounds the wisdom of the peasant, the new fashion naturalism that in relation to all matters of sex and society goes back far to quite primitive instincts and conditions, the reappearance of the *panem et circenses* in the form of wage-disputes and sports stadia – all these things betoken the definite closing down of the Culture and the opening of a quite new phase of human existence – anti-provincial, late, futureless, but quite inevitable.¹⁸

As Spengler continues, highlighting the impossibility of the production of 'great' works of art, music and architecture in 'the early winter of full Civilization':

We are civilized, not Gothic or Rococo, people; we have to reckon with the hard cold facts of a *late* life, to which the parallel is to be found not in Pericles' Athens but in Caesar's Rome. Of great painting or great music there can no longer be, for Western people, any question. Their architectural possibilities have been exhausted these hundred years [...] But we have not *chosen* this time. We cannot help it if we are born as men of the early winter of full

Civilization, instead of on the golden summit of a ripe Culture, in a Phidias or a Mozart time.¹⁹

Spengler's vision here is an essentially tragic one. His times, as he sees them, are characterized by the inevitable decline of culture into civilization; by a new commercially-driven cosmopolitanism; by a 'keen and cold' scientific (anti-religious) rationality; and by the exhaustion of artistic and intellectual possibilities. It is revealing then that during a conversation in the 1930s, Wittgenstein advises his friend Drury to read Spengler's *Decline* because the book might teach him 'something about the age we [are] now living in'.²⁰ Wittgenstein also offers to Drury the following cultural anecdote, which is shot through with Spenglerian resonances: 'I was walking about in Cambridge [recently] and passed a bookshop, and in the window were portraits of Russell, Freud, and Einstein. A little further on, in a music shop, I saw portraits of Beethoven, Schubert and Chopin. Comparing these portraits I felt intensely the terrible degeneration that had come over the human spirit in the course of only a hundred years.'²¹

Despite Wittgenstein's close proximity both to Spengler and the broader intellectual tradition of *Kulturkritik*, it is also important to note some significant points of divergence. Unlike Spengler and Mann, Wittgenstein does not provide a systematic account of the relation between culture and civilization;²² nor – unlike Benda and Mannheim – does he attempt to formulate a vision of how society might be organized in the future. Indeed, as G.H. von Wright notes: 'Wittgenstein's world view is anything but "prophetic".'²³ And as Wittgenstein himself puts it in a passage in his manuscripts of 1941: 'You can't *construct* clouds. And that is why the future you dream of never comes true.'²⁴ (And later: 'Who knows the laws according to which society unfolds? I am sure even the cleverest has no idea.'²⁵) In this respect, rather than putting forward his concerns about Western civilization in the form of a theory, Wittgenstein expresses them instead through the form and style of his philosophizing – a mode of writing which is intimately connected to what he refers to, in the Preface to the *Investigations*, as the 'darkness' of his times (*PI*, p. x).

According to Wittgenstein, the hallmark of a civilization without culture is belief in 'progress' – progress, that is, understood in terms of ceaseless scientific and technological endeavour. For Wittgenstein, unrestrained faith in science and technology is linked to what he calls the 'apocalyptic' conception of the world:

The truly apocalyptic view of the world is that things do *not* repeat themselves. It is not e.g. absurd to believe that the scientific and technological age is the beginning of the end for humanity, that the idea of Great Progress is a bedazzlement, along with the idea that the truth will ultimately be known; that there is nothing good or desirable about scientific knowledge and that humanity, in seeking it, is falling into a trap. It is by no means clear that this is not how things are.²⁶

This scepticism towards progress is a familiar theme amongst Wittgenstein's modernist contemporaries. In his essay, 'In dieser großen Zeit' ('In These Great Times'), Karl Kraus argues that modern existence has become subordinate to the human desire for advancement and expansion. 'Progress', Kraus writes, 'lives to eat, and at times supplies proof that it can die to eat. It endures hardship so that it may prosper [...] Progress, under whose feet the grass mourns and the forest turns into paper from which newspaper plants grow, has subordinated the purpose of life to the means of subsistence and turned us into the nuts and bolts for our tools.'²⁷ In the domain of philosophy, Wittgenstein's work encapsulates this critique of progress as an end in itself. In a remark in his manuscripts, he thus draws an important distinction between his own belief in clarity and transparency and the ideology of complex construction which dominates the empirical sciences:

Our civilization is characterized by the word progress. Progress is its form, it is not one of its properties that it makes progress. Typically it constructs. Its activity is to construct a more and more complicated structure. And even clarity is only a means to this end and not an end in itself.

For me on the contrary clarity, transparency, is an end in itself.

I am not interested in erecting a building but in having the foundations of possible buildings transparently before me.

So I am aiming at something different than are the scientists and my thoughts move differently than do theirs.²⁸

In his autobiography, Rudolph Carnap writes: 'I sometimes had the impression that the deliberately rational and unemotional attitude of the scientist and likewise any ideas which had the flavour of "enlightenment" were repugnant to Wittgenstein.'²⁹ Similarly, Hans Sluga observes that Wittgenstein stands in opposition 'to those movements in the twentieth century that have sought to reconstruct philosophy in a scientific manner.'³⁰ To illustrate the point, Sluga quotes Wittgenstein's own remark in the *Blue Book*: 'Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness.'³¹ For Wittgenstein, then, the scientific and technological problem-solving spirit of modernity is in many ways antithetical to the proper task of philosophy.³² At various points in his writings, he thus opposes the aesthetic investigation to the scientific one: 'Scientific questions [...] never really grip me. Only *conceptual* and *aesthetic* questions have that effect on me.'³³ He also emphasizes the didactic role which the arts can play: 'People nowadays think, scientists are there to instruct them, poets [...] to entertain them. *That the latter have something to teach them*; that never occurs to them.'³⁴

Here we encounter a number of significant parallels with the early Nietzsche. In his notebooks of the 1870s, Nietzsche argues that it has proven impossible to build a culture upon scientific knowledge. Science, he writes, 'has become a source of nourishment for egoism. The state and society have drafted [...] science into their service in order to exploit it for *their* purposes. The normal condition is that of *war*.'³⁵ By contrast, the philosopher and the artist forge a special unity: together they are able to *subdue* the scientific-drive and to open up a new, non-instrumental way of looking at the world: '[T]he philosopher and the

artist tell the trade secrets of nature. The sphere of the philosopher and the artist exists above the tumult of contemporary history, beyond necessity. [...] Philosophers appear during those times of great danger, when the wheel of time is turning faster and faster. Together with art, they step into the place vacated by myth.³⁶ As Nietzsche continues: '[A]rt alone is [now] powerful enough to endure and to present the "truth" about the world.'³⁷

A number of these points are strikingly echoed (at the same time as being moved dialectically forward) by Adorno. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (co-authored with Max Horkheimer), Adorno does not simply elucidate the negative effects of the scientific-progressivist world-view; rather, and more suggestively, he demonstrates how 'enlightenment' contains the seeds of its own reversal: the abandonment of critical thought, culminating in a final reversion to mythology and the total domination of both nature and the individual.³⁸ On Adorno's view, a possible (utopian) overcoming of enlightenment-domination rests with art. As outlined in Chapter 1, for Adorno it is authentic modernist art works which are able to tell the 'truth' about the world to the extent that they execute a 'determinate negation' of 'what is' – a 'critique of the untrue'.³⁹ The truth-content of such works (which for Adorno always requires philosophical elaboration⁴⁰), is not to be thought of as any kind of metaphysical message which they directly communicate; instead, it inheres in artworks 'methexis [participation] in history and the determinate critique that they exercise through their form'.⁴¹ Modernist works are thus able to provide a reminder of the possibility of non-instrumental thinking, a clue as to what non-dominated praxis might look like, because, paradoxically, the forms of the works themselves provide a 'mimesis of reification'.⁴²

The more total society becomes, the more completely it contracts to a unanimous system, and all the more do artworks in which this experience is sedimented become the other of this society. [...] [Modernist] art is as abstract as social relations have in truth become. [...] Because the spell of external reality over its subjects

and their reactions has become absolute, the artwork can only oppose this spell by assimilating itself to it.⁴³

Given their shared distaste for instrumental reason; their emphasis upon the close relation between philosophy and art; and their abiding concern with questions of language and form, it is somewhat surprising that Adorno is unable to discern the dialectical character of Wittgenstein's writing. Passing over the truth-content of the work and re-stating only the manifest content of its pseudo-propositions, Adorno has the following to say about the *Tractatus*: 'As long as philosophy is no more than the cult of what "is the case" [Adorno here refers to *Tractatus* section 1.1] it enters into competition with the sciences to which in delusion it assimilates itself – and loses. If it dissociates itself from the sciences, however, and in refreshed merriment thinks itself free of them, it becomes a powerless reserve, the shadow of shadowy Sunday religion.'⁴⁴ In *Hegel: Three Studies*, Adorno rounds on the *Tractatus* again, this time focusing on the book's final remark:

Wittgenstein's maxim, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent," in which the extreme of positivism spills over into the gesture of reverent authoritarian authenticity, and which for that reason exerts a kind of intellectual mass suggestion, is utterly antiphilosophical. If philosophy can be defined at all, it is an effort to express things one cannot speak about, to help express the nonidentical despite the fact that expressing it identifies it at the same time.⁴⁵

I return in more detail to the Wittgenstein-as-positivist fallacy in the second part of this chapter.⁴⁶ For now, however, all that remains to be said is that Wittgenstein's early work is something of a missed modernist opportunity for Adorno. In a letter to Moritz Schlick, Wittgenstein says that Carnap 'completely misunderstood the last sentences of the *Tractatus* – and hence the fundamental idea of the whole book'.⁴⁷ Somewhat ironically, Adorno falls into the same trap, his reading mirroring that of those positivist thinkers he accuses of wishing to 'liquidate philosophy'.⁴⁸

Modernity and the ladder

Although, in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein does not explicitly discuss his attitude towards his times, there is no doubt that the issue of modernity exerts a powerful influence over the text. For instance, Wittgenstein claims that ‘the whole modern view of the world’ is characterized by an ‘illusion’. This illusion consists in the belief that science (and, in particular, scientific *laws*) can provide a complete *explanation* of how things are in the world. As Wittgenstein puts it:

At the basis of the whole modern view of the world lies the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena.

So people stop short at natural laws as at something unassailable, as did the ancients at God and Fate.

And they both are right and wrong. But the ancients were clearer, in so far as they recognized one clear terminus, whereas the modern system makes it appear as though *everything* were explained.

(6.371–6.372)

In this passage, Wittgenstein commends the ancients for their ability to recognize that, at some point, explanations must come to an end.⁴⁹ At the same time, he cautions the moderns against thinking that theoretical accounts of the world can provide a complete answer to *every* problem.⁵⁰ As he goes on to state at section 6.52: ‘even if *all possible* scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all’.⁵¹

One of the things which the *Tractatus* thus aims to get its readers to see, is how the modern desire for ‘explanations’ is in itself a cause of deep disquietude. In the context of Wittgenstein’s early work, this desire can take a number of forms: it can consist in an attempt to provide an exact definition of ‘simple objects’; an account of the picture’s relation with reality; or a once and for all outline of the formal laws governing thought. Whilst this search for answers might give the sense that one is making

philosophical *progress*, what Wittgenstein wants to show is that what we take to be 'the deepest' philosophical problems are in fact *not problems* at all (4.003). Rather, they are confusions of thought, arising from a failure to understand the logic of our language. Instead of seeking solutions to those pseudo-problems, then, Wittgenstein encourages us to find a form of living that will engender peace.⁵² Such peace will not be brought about by any increase in the activity of the knowledge-drive, but by arriving at a point where the issues that confront us disappear. As Wittgenstein puts it at section 6.521 of the *Tractatus*: 'The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of this problem. (Is not this the reason why men to whom after long doubting the sense of life became clear, could not then say wherein this sense consisted?)' What the *Tractatus* is therefore advocating is not conventional philosophical progress, but rather the conversion to a new philosophical point of view: one which results in an awakening from the dream world of traditional philosophical theorizing.⁵³

This idea of awakening, connects with a different idea of the ladder to the one that is traditionally put forward. This is the idea of the ladder not as a straightforward linear structure – leading to a view of the world 'sub specie aeterni' (6.45) – but rather as a circle (or arc) which takes us back, via a long and sophisticated detour, to the point from which we started.⁵⁴ On this reading, the *Tractatus* begins by introducing us to a (mythical) picture of 'language' and 'the world', in order to return us back to them, at the end of the book, once the metaphysical aura surrounding these terms has been dissolved. Wittgenstein describes the goal of this process (which goes by way of the author's strategy of discarding (6.54)) as coming to see 'the world aright'. Here, however, we need to reiterate the point that when we come to see the world aright we do not see it as it *really* is or without any errors in our thinking. Rather, seeing the world aright means arriving at a clearer picture of our life with language and the motivations behind our philosophical temptations to speak outside of ordinary language games: 'Don't for *heaven's sake*, be afraid of talking nonsense! Only don't fail to pay attention to your nonsense.'

Understanding the *Tractatus* in terms of a structure of return, allows us to place the book in the broader literary and philosophical context of modernity. As M.H. Abrams observes in *Natural Supernaturalism*, for the German romantics the figure of the circular journey plays an important role in representing the development of the individual spirit 'as it strives [...] to win its way back to a higher mode of the original unity with itself from which [...] it has inescapably divided itself off'.⁵⁵ The metaphor of the circular journey, as Abrams illustrates, is encountered throughout romanticism – in the philosophical writings of Hegel, Fichte and Schiller, as well as in the literary works of Hölderlin (*Hyperion*) and Goethe (*Faust*).⁵⁶ It also makes a striking return, in the early part of the twentieth century, in the poetry of T.S. Eliot. In *Four Quartets*, Eliot's complex meditations deal with the poet-narrator's own 'spiritual quest [...] for the lost but unforgotten garden'.⁵⁷ His pilgrimage, as we discover in 'East Coker', the second quartet, is a circular one: 'In my beginning is my end [...] In my end is my beginning'.⁵⁸ In the last movement of the poem, reflecting on the nature of his journey, the poet-narrator remarks:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.⁵⁹

In the *Tractatus*, arriving back at the point from which we started means arriving back with language, with the world, and with our (naturally erring) selves. In this respect, when we throw away the ladder we do not do so because it has succeeded in leading us to a new place, but rather because we have come to recognize that the place we want to get to is the place that we are *already* at. At the end of the book, then, having fully understood the implications of the author's dialectical method, we are already in a position to appreciate the following remark from Wittgenstein's later manuscripts:

I might say: if the place I want to reach could only be climbed up to by a ladder, I would give up trying to get there. For the place to which I really have to go is one that I must actually be at already. Anything that can be reached with a ladder does not interest me.⁶⁰

II.

Wittgenstein and the question of politics

Wittgenstein's understanding of his times in terms of 'the disappearance of a culture',⁶¹ his critique of the ideology of progress, and his disdain for the scientific-technological problem-solving spirit of the age, raises the issue of the political implications of his work. Specifically, the question has been posed: Is Wittgenstein a philosopher of the left or the right? During the 1950s and 1960s – the period following Wittgenstein's death (1951) and the posthumous publication of *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) – the general intellectual consensus (in both left and right circles) was that Wittgenstein's philosophy was inherently conservative. In his 1959 work *Words and Things*, Ernest Gellner thus writes that Wittgenstein's thought 'is conservative in the values which it in fact insinuates [...] It refuses to undermine any accepted habits, but, on the contrary, concentrates on showing that the *reasons underlying criticisms* of accepted habits are in general mistaken.'⁶² In *One Dimensional Man* (1964), the Frankfurt School critical theorist Herbert Marcuse adopts a similar line of attack. According to Marcuse, Wittgenstein's philosophy, with its emphasis upon linguistic analysis and its rejection of the 'vocabulary of "metaphysics"', 'militates against intellectual non-conformity'.⁶³ Rather than striving to imagine the world otherwise, this philosophy restricts itself to reaffirming established modes of language and thought. As Marcuse puts it:

Paying respect to the prevailing variety of meanings and usages, to the power and common sense of ordinary speech, while blocking (as extraneous material) analysis of what this speech says about the society that speaks it, linguistic philosophy suppresses once more what is continually suppressed in this universe of discourse and behaviour. [...]

The self-styled poverty of philosophy, committed with all its concepts to the given state of affairs, distrusts the possibilities of a new experience. Subjection to the rule of the established facts is

total – only linguistic facts, to be sure, but the society speaks in its language, and we are told to obey. The prohibitions are severe and authoritarian: “Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language.”⁶⁴

In a 1971 essay entitled ‘Literature and Sociology’, the cultural theorist Raymond Williams makes a number of remarks about ordinary language philosophy which suggest clear affinities with Marcuse’s critique of Wittgenstein. In the context of a discussion of the work of Lucien Goldmann, Williams argues that within the humanities there is a strong tendency for British thinkers and writers to be constantly ‘pulled back towards ordinary language: not only in certain rhythms and in choices of words, but also in a manner of exposition.’⁶⁵ Although Williams acknowledges some positive aspects of this ‘habitual manner’, he emphasizes what he takes to be its negative consequences: ‘a willingness to share, or at least not too explicitly to challenge, the consciousness of the group of which the thinker or writer [...] is willingly or unwillingly but still practically a member.’⁶⁶ This group, as Williams points out, is (‘especially in places such as Cambridge’) ‘in effect and detail a privileged and at times ruling class.’⁶⁷ Consequently, the pull back towards ordinary language is, at the same time, a pull towards the dominant consciousness: ‘a framing of ideas within certain polite but definite limits.’⁶⁸

What Williams (like Marcuse) is here criticizing is not only the privileged position from which ordinary language philosophy speaks, but also its inherent quietism: its unwillingness to challenge the dominant (ideological) world-view. Whilst Williams’s essay does not refer specifically to Wittgenstein, there can be little doubt that it is the latter’s philosophical legacy which is being placed under intellectual and ideological scrutiny. For Wittgenstein, ‘the propositions of ordinary language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order’ (*TLP* 5.5563);⁶⁹ and thus ‘what we do [in philosophy] is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use’ (*PI*, §116). For Williams, however, the return to ordinary language is itself indicative of a deeper crisis of thought and of politics; and it is out of this crisis that there emerges a

‘search for alternative traditions’ and ‘alternative methods’ – a search which is evidenced most clearly in what Williams describes as ‘the long reach for theory’.⁷⁰

The most sustained attempt to establish connections between Wittgenstein’s thinking and the ideologies of conservatism is carried out by the philosopher J.C. Nyíri. In his essay ‘Wittgenstein’s Later Thought In Relation to Conservatism’, Nyíri argues that Wittgenstein ‘belong[ed] to a constellation of conservative thinkers’, and that his ‘conservative attitudes’ (which he expressed in relation to language, art, literature and social practices) ‘crystallized into a kind of conservative theory’ in both the *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*.⁷¹ As evidence, Nyíri cites the following pieces of biographical data: ‘Wittgenstein’s admiration for Dostoevsky’, ‘his dislike for any language that [had] not “grown organically”’, ‘his often voiced disparaging judgment of modern art [and] architecture’, ‘his distaste for modes of thinking characterized by the word “progress”’, and his understanding of his times as ‘an age without culture’.⁷² According to Nyíri, these attitudes and tastes point to a clear set of ‘family resemblances’ between Wittgenstein and certain renowned conservative thinkers, including Spengler, Paul Ernst and Moeller van den Bruck.

In addition to locating him within the force field of conservative thought, Nyíri also contends that Wittgenstein’s philosophy solves one of the key theoretical problems of conservatism; namely, how to uphold ‘absolute standards’ and ‘fixed truths’ in a world in which all ‘absolute standards have perished historically, are a thing of the past, and fixed truths do not exist at all’.⁷³ For Nyíri, this paradox is solved by Wittgenstein’s later concepts of ‘following a rule’ and ‘forms of life’. ‘The following of a rule is’, as Nyíri states, ‘a custom, an institution, embedded in the agreements, in the correspondences of behaviour within society [...] Rule-following is, in the last analysis, blind: it cannot be explained or justified’.⁷⁴ Because language and thinking (as rule-governed phenomena) both rest upon ‘agreements’ and ‘regularities’ in the behaviour of individuals within society, it follows that ‘any given form of life [...] cannot actually be criticized’: ‘the given form of life is the

ultimate givenness.’⁷⁵ From this Nyíri concludes that ‘any human being must, in order to be a human being, be constrained by some form of life; and, moreover, that such forms of life are “network[s] of tradition” which “cannot be consciously transcended” or “judged”’.⁷⁶

Nyíri’s analysis of Wittgenstein’s position is, I want to argue, radically mistaken; and therefore his claim that ‘Wittgenstein’s conceptual analyses can [...] be regarded as a [...] foundation of conservatism’⁷⁷ is one which cannot be upheld. Whilst Nyíri is correct to emphasize that for Wittgenstein rule-following involves training, custom, use, institution, technique, practice and so on,⁷⁸ he is wrong to suggest that (i) rules ‘cannot be explained or justified’⁷⁹ and (ii) that rules act as the immovable *foundations* upon which ‘all order [...] and communication by means of language’ rest.⁸⁰ Arguing against this latter conception of rules, Cavell eloquently remarks: ‘[Wittgenstein] wishes to indicate how inessential the “appeal to rules” is as an explanation of language. For what has to be “explained” is, put flatly and bleakly, this’:

We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humour and of significance and of fulfilment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation – all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls “forms of life.” Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying.⁸¹

According to Cavell, what we do and what we say thus rests not upon a fixed and uncontested set of rules (which can be grasped from an independent and objective vantage point), but on our involvement with

and our dependence upon everyday human practices.⁸² Immersed, as we normally are, in our 'whirl of organism', the appeal to foundations does not strike us as necessary. What matters, as Cavell points out, are shared 'routes of interest and feeling'⁸³ and 'the attunement of one human being's words with those of others'.⁸⁴

Nyíri's account of 'forms of life' is also deeply problematic. In the *Investigations* (contra Nyíri), Wittgenstein does not speak of 'the given form of life', nor of 'the ultimate givenness'; rather, he writes: 'What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – *forms of life*' (*PI*, p. 192). Acceptance, however, does not preclude criticism, nor should it be taken to imply support for the status quo. As Terry Eagleton neatly observes: 'There is no reason why what has to be accepted are *these particular* forms of life, and indeed little reason to believe that Wittgenstein himself was in the least content with his own society.'⁸⁵ Wittgenstein's alleged quietism – the notion that, for him, existing forms of life and language are immune to criticism – is often linked to the following remark in the *Investigations*:

Philosophy can in no way interfere with the actual use of language;
it can in the end only describe it.

For it cannot give it any foundation either.

It leaves everything as it is.

(*PI*, §124)

For critics such as Nyíri (and indeed Marcuse) this remark is understood as stating that philosophy *ought not* to interfere with 'the actual use of language'. It is therefore taken as lending support to what Marcuse describes as 'the prevailing universe of discourse and behaviour'.⁸⁶ This interpretation, however, misses both the point and the context of Wittgenstein's statement. In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein readily accepts that 'a reform [of language] for particular purposes, an improvement in our terminology to prevent misunderstanding in practice, is perfectly possible' (*PI*, §132); yet this is *not* the issue with which he is concerned. What concerns Wittgenstein – and indeed what

he takes to be the *task* of philosophy – is to uncover the types of confusions which we routinely fall into when we engage in philosophical questioning. Such confusions are manifestations of our ‘failure [...] to command a *clear view* of the use of our words’ (PI, §122). They arise, according to Wittgenstein, ‘when language is like an engine idling’ (PI, §132) or when it ‘*goes on holiday*’ (PI, §38). Underlying these confusions are bewitching (PI, §109) and disquieting (PI, §112) pictures (PI, §115) of language, which hold us captive (PI, §115) and lead to feelings of dissatisfaction with ordinary, everyday words. Being in the grip of these metaphysical pictures is akin to suffering from an ‘illness’ (PI, §255); and it is the role of philosophy, as Wittgenstein conceives of it, to treat this illness. Put simply, then, the purpose of the *Investigations* is *therapeutic* (PI, §133); and Wittgenstein’s particular therapeutic method consists not in advancing philosophical doctrines and ‘theses’ (PI, §§128, 109), but in providing a ‘perspicuous representation’ (PI, §122) of the use of our words. Giving a clear presentation of our words-in-use is of ‘fundamental significance’ (PI, §122) because philosophical problems require us to ‘[look] into the working of our language [...] [they] are solved, not by reporting new experience, but by arranging what we have always known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language’ (PI, §109).

To return, then, to the remark at *Investigations* §124 (‘Philosophy does not interfere with the actual use of language [...] It leaves everything as it is’), and to place it within the context of the philosophical perspective just outlined, we might suggest the following interpretation. What this statement means is simply that it is not the role of philosophy to attempt to *change* anything in language. ‘We are not’, as Wittgenstein observes, ‘*striving after* an ideal, as if our ordinary vague sentences had not yet got quite an unexceptional sense, and a perfect language awaited construction by us’ (PI, §98). Instead, we must begin with our ordinary, everyday language – not because we are committed to ‘leaving everything as it is’, but because *this* is the very ‘ground’ (PI, §118) upon which we stand. Diamond provides an insightful gloss on this point, when she remarks: ‘The point of attention to ordinary language is not that it is in any way

sacred; rather, attention to ordinary language is capable of transforming our problems and our sense of where we are with them.⁸⁷

Understood in this way, there is nothing in Wittgenstein's view of philosophy which supports linguistic conservatism or which speaks against a transformation of our existing forms of life. Indeed, we might argue that in order to overcome the kinds of philosophical confusions which hold us captive, a change in our current orientation towards the world is *exactly* what is required. In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein sounds this note when he speaks of the need to rotate 'our whole investigation' around 'the fixed point of our real need' (*PI*, §108). This idea is, I would argue, already hinted at in the penultimate section of the *Tractatus*, when the author invites the reader to 'throw away' the book's nonsensical sentences as a precondition for 'seeing the world aright' (6.54). It is, however, in the (previously cited) passage from the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* that we find, most clearly expressed, the idea that a change in our social mode of life is needed to bring about a change in our philosophical thinking: 'The sickness of a time is cured by an alteration in the mode of life of human beings, and it [is] possible for the sickness of philosophical problems to get cured only through a changed mode of thought and of life.'⁸⁸

This point is a *genuinely* materialist one: the sickness of philosophical problems, which are rooted in the sickness of a time, cannot be cured by the intellectual endeavours of individuals; rather, what has to change is something deep within society as a whole. On this point, Wittgenstein is strikingly close to Marx, who, in his Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach, famously states: 'philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it.'⁸⁹ Both thinkers, rather than seeking to establish new 'schools' of thought, call into question the whole enterprise of traditional philosophy and endeavour to recast it in a new key. As Marx writes: 'Philosophy and the study of the actual world have the same relation to one another as masturbation and sexual love. [...] The philosophers would only have to dissolve their language into the ordinary language, from which it is abstracted, to recognise it as the distorted language of the actual world, and to realise that neither thoughts nor

language in themselves form a realm of their own, that they are only *manifestations* of actual life.⁹⁰ In his dictations for the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein describes his own work as ‘one of the heirs of the subject that used to be called “philosophy”’.⁹¹ In a later manuscripts remark, he goes on (signalling a possible debt to Piero Sraffa along with the numerous other Marxists with whom he was associated at the time):⁹² ‘It is not by any means clear to me, that I wish for a continuation of my work by others, more than *a change in the way we live*, making all these questions superfluous.’⁹³

Wittgenstein’s blindness

Unlike Marx, however, Wittgenstein’s ability to imagine a changed set of social relations is impeded by two factors: first, a failure to grasp the working class as *the* collective agent of social (and intellectual) change; and second, his own general alienation from the political struggles of his times.⁹⁴ This alienation is due, in no small part, to Wittgenstein’s own conception of what it means to be a philosopher. In a remark which appears in *Zettel*, Wittgenstein puts the point this way: ‘The philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas. That is what makes him into a philosopher.’⁹⁵ This remark clearly sums up Wittgenstein’s attitude towards the mixing of philosophy and politics. Such an attitude is also expressed in a conversation with Rush Rhees in 1945:

[I]n doing philosophy you have got to be ready *constantly* to change the direction in which you are moving. At some point you see that there must be something wrong with the whole way you have been tackling the difficulty. You have to be able to give up those central notions which have seemed to be what you must keep if you are to think at all.⁹⁶

As Rhees recalls, what prompts Wittgenstein’s remark is the former’s revelation that he has been thinking about becoming a member of the Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist Party. For Wittgenstein,

communism is no different to any other philosophical idea; and thus one has to be constantly prepared to question its validity, and, if necessary, to separate oneself from it. In his manuscripts of the early 1930s, Wittgenstein criticizes his friend Frank Ramsey for being a 'bourgeois thinker';⁹⁷ however, in the conversation with Rhees, Wittgenstein's own bourgeois attachment to the idea of the autonomous, free-thinking intellectual (unhindered by party ties) is clearly evident. What such an attachment is blind to – what, we might say, it works to *repress* – is the relation between cognition and class, philosophy and proletarian praxis. This connection is brought out by Marx in his Introduction to 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*' (1843/4): 'The *emancipation of Germany* is the *emancipation of man*. The *head* of this emancipation is *philosophy*, its *heart* is the *proletariat*. Philosophy cannot be actualised without the abolition [*Aufhebung*] of the proletariat; the proletariat cannot be abolished without the actualisation of philosophy.'⁹⁸

It is here, I think, that we can pinpoint the key distinction between the philosophical outlooks of Wittgenstein and Marx. For Marx, philosophical and political emancipation are one and the same: the realization of philosophy requires the self-abolition of the proletariat; at the same time, in order to abolish itself as a class, the proletariat must use philosophy to become conscious of its historical role. The proletariat (as a class which has a 'universal character' and stands for the 'dissolution' of the existing order) provides philosophy with its 'material tools' (the concrete means by which it transcends its status as mere intellectual criticism), while philosophy provides the proletariat with its 'spiritual tools' (the intellectual means by which it recovers its essential humanity).⁹⁹ The close connection that Marx recognizes between cognition and class enables him to grasp how German philosophy 'merely imitates in a philosophic form the conceptions of the German middle class; how the boasting of [...] philosophic commentators only mirrors the wretchedness of the real conditions in Germany.'¹⁰⁰ Wittgenstein, by contrast, whilst able to point up 'the darkness of [his] times', and to speak in general terms about the need for a changed

‘mode of life’, has no concrete framework for explaining the continued re-emergence of the misleading pictures that hold us ‘captive’ or the ‘mental cramps’ that obstruct clear thinking. In large part, this is a consequence of his hostility towards any kind of theorizing. As he puts it in a December 1930 discussion with Moritz Schlick: ‘If I were told anything that was a *theory*, I would say, No, no! That does not interest me. Even if this theory were true, it would not interest me [...] *For me*, a theory is without value. A theory gives me nothing.’¹⁰¹ In the *Investigations*, this rejection of theory is reiterated: ‘And we may not advance *any kind of theory*. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all *explanation* and description alone must take its place’ (PI, §109).¹⁰² For Wittgenstein, all theory (including Marx’s theory) equates with *scientism*; and it is the scientific *Weltanschauung* which leads the philosopher into ‘complete darkness’. In opposition to Marx, then, what Wittgenstein offers is not a theory but a method: one which allows one to uncover the nonsense which arises once language ‘*goes on holiday*’ (PI, §38). Whilst this method can be pressed into the service of Marxist philosophy (indeed, I would argue that it can be seen as an *essential* component of any fully worked out Marxist theory of language, mind or epistemology), it leads, in Wittgenstein’s own case, to a hollowed out political perspective. As he writes in his diaries of the 1940s, setting his face firmly against the author of *The German Ideology* and *Capital*, but, at the same time, succumbing to a kind of passive nihilism:

A man reacts *like this*: he says “No, I *won’t* tolerate that!” – and resists it. Perhaps this brings about an equally intolerable situation and perhaps by then strength for any further revolt is exhausted. People say: “If *he* hadn’t done *that*, the evil would have been avoided.” But what justifies this? Who knows the laws according to which society develops? I am quite sure they are a closed book even to the cleverest of men. If you fight, you fight. If you hope, you hope.

You can fight, hope and even believe without believing *scientifically*.¹⁰³

The *Tractatus*, Modernism and the Limits of Language

[I]n so far as people think they can see the “limit of human understanding”, they believe of course that they can see beyond it.

–Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*¹

The *Tractatus* and limits

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein makes a number of important remarks about the ‘limits’ of language, logic and the world, which open up on the themes of subjectivity and solipsism. In this chapter, my intention will be to explore these remarks in order to show their relevance for debates which emerge in and around the subject of aesthetic modernism.

At *Tractatus* section 5.6–5.62, Wittgenstein writes as follows:

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.

Logic fills the world: the limits of the world are also its limits. We cannot therefore say in logic: This and this there is in the world, that there is not.

For that would apparently presuppose that we exclude certain possibilities, and this cannot be the case since otherwise logic must get outside the limits of the world: that is, if it could consider these limits from the other side also.

What we cannot think, that we cannot think: we cannot therefore say what we cannot think.

This remark provides a key to the question, to what extent solipsism is a truth.

In fact what solipsism *means*, is quite correct, only it cannot be *said*, but it shows itself.

That the world is *my* world, shows itself in the fact that the limits of the language (*the* language which I understand) mean the limits of *my* world.

(5.6–5.62)

If we look closely at the numbering system, we can see that the pivotal remark here is ‘*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world’ (5.6). Unsurprisingly, Wittgenstein’s exegetes have taken radically different views on the question of limits in the *Tractatus*. It will therefore be instructive to begin by considering some of these views and by looking at the important role which they play in different interpretations of the work as a whole.

In his study *Insight and Illusion*, P.M.S. Hacker takes seriously the notion of limits of language, logic and the world as deployed in the *Tractatus*. According to Hacker, ‘[t]he limits of the thinkable are set in language [...] [w]hat lies beyond those limits cannot be said.’² The source of all limits, on Hacker’s view, is the ‘metaphysical subject’,³ which he identifies as ‘the bearer of good and evil’⁴ and also as the determiner of linguistic meaning.⁵ On this interpretation, the idea of language propounded by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* is ‘strongly egocentric’.⁶

That the limits of my language are identical with the limits of my world is more or less intelligible by reference to the claims that logic is prior to every experience (5.552), and that the content of propositions is given by *my* experience, by *my* injecting content into the forms that mirror the nature of the world. For only “objects” *I* experience can *I* correlate with names of my language. And only what *I* thus project is what *I* can view as language, i.e. as facts standing in a representative relationship.⁷

In contrast to Hacker, anti-metaphysical readers interpret the *Tractatus* as a work which seeks to undermine, rather than endorse, the idea that there are fixed and necessary limits to language and thought. As Floyd thus writes: 'To be sure, the [*Tractatus*] repeatedly conjures up the idea of language and thought as limited, as bounded by a fixed and necessary framework of logical or propositional form, and it also conjures up the idea of logic as limited, as bounded by its role as an inexpressible yet necessary form of infinite complexity mirroring the necessary structure of the world. But the underlying intent of such conjuring [...] is to shake us free from these ideas of effability and necessity.'⁸ Arguing from a similar perspective, Conant asserts that 'the very perception of the limits of language as somehow *confining* one and *debarring* one from one's search for truth is something that lies at the very core of [...] philosophical illusion.'⁹ It is, therefore, according to Conant, this notion of limits that the *Tractatus* attempts to get readers to overcome:

In the end, the limits vanish – that is, the idea that there are limits here confining one is the central idea that one needs to learn how to throw away. Such a vision of confinement invites the false hope that philosophy holds out a promise of being able to offer us liberation and with it some hitherto obstructed possibility for [...] advancement.¹⁰

On the anti-metaphysical account, the *Tractatus* thus 'rejects the very idea of limits of language that prohibit us from saying certain substantial kinds of things.'¹¹ As Wittgenstein says in the book's Preface, such limits, if they can be drawn at all, can 'only be drawn *in* language' (*TLP*, p. 27)¹² – that is, in our ordinary, everyday efforts to make sense of particular combinations of signs.

Limits, Adorno and the Kantian 'block'

Later on in this chapter (in the section 'The Illusion of Limits'), I will look more closely at how, on my own dialectical account, the *Tractatus* brings the reader to see the essential emptiness of the idea of fixed and necessary limits of language and thought. In this section, however, in order to see

more clearly some of the issues involved, my intention will be to place the idea of limits in its broader philosophical context.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant's aim is to demonstrate the limits of what we can positively know. On his view, true and absolute knowledge takes the form of synthetic a priori judgements;¹³ and such judgements do not only relate to 'objects of possible experience' they are also 'principles of the possibility of this experience'.¹⁴ Although Kant's first *Critique* is aimed at demarcating the limits of reason, he also argues that we are driven by something like an intrinsic requirement of our thinking to try to transgress these limits – to pass from the world of sensible experience to the sphere of things-in-themselves which Kant calls the noumenal realm:

Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer.¹⁵

In his 1959 lectures on Kant's first *Critique*, Adorno explores the theme of limits in Kant by establishing his concept of the Kantian 'block'.¹⁶ Adorno uses the concept of the block to refer to the confinement of knowledge to the world of experience and the restriction of the forms of the understanding within the world. According to Adorno, the Kantian block 'can be understood as a form of unmediated Cartesian dualism that is reflexive, that reflects upon itself. It is a dualism in which a great chasm yawns between inner and outer, a chasm that can never be bridged'.¹⁷ For Adorno, '[t]his chasm is the chasm of the alienation of human beings from one another, and the alienation of human beings from the world of things [...] [an alienation] created by the universal exchange relation'.¹⁸ And so, as he writes:

Through the idea that our knowledge is blocked Kantian philosophy expresses as an experience the state of philosophy at the time. In particular, it expresses the idea that in this universally mediated society, determined as it is by exchange, in this society marked by radical alienation, we are denied access to existing reality as if by a blank wall.¹⁹

Adorno develops the concept of the Kantian block by examining the relation between subjectivism and reification.²⁰ On Adorno's view, these two categories 'are not incompatible opposites, but corollaries'.²¹ Hence, 'the more we appropriate, the more we find ourselves alienated from what we are really looking for, and what we do actually appropriate is only a kind of lifeless residue'.²² This leads to a situation in which 'knowledge is illusory because the closer it comes to its object, the more it shapes it in its own image and thus drives it further and further away'.²³ According to Adorno, this is what is reflected in the doctrine of the block, which comes to represent 'a kind of metaphysical mourning'.²⁴ It is, as Adorno observes, the subject's 'memory of what is best, of something that we must not forget [...] [t]he memory of the questions philosophy formerly asked [about] what lies beyond reason'.²⁵

Adorno's portrayal of the block draws out the deeply antinomic structure of Kant's philosophy. On the one hand, Kant wants to preserve 'the intention of philosophy to understand reality as a whole [...] At the same time, he declares that philosophy is *incapable* of this, and that the only form in which the totality can be grasped is the expression of the fact that it cannot be comprehended'.²⁶ The Kantian system, Adorno writes, 'attempt[s] to give an account of the totality, while simultaneously conceding that this totality is no such thing, that subject and object do not seamlessly fit together'.²⁷ This failure of thought to comprehend the totality is, therefore, on Adorno's reading, revealed as a truth about the nature of cognition under the conditions of reification.

For Adorno, the 'metaphysical block' thus plays a pivotal role within Kant's first *Critique*. Its significance is emphasized nowhere more clearly than in the following passage from Adorno's lectures:

If I am not mistaken, we are looking here at the deepest aspect of Kant, at his attempt to say what cannot be said – and his entire philosophy is actually nothing more than a form of stammering, infinitely expanded and elevated. Like the act of stammering, it is a form of Dada, the attempt to say what actually cannot be said.²⁸

In this passage, Adorno locates ‘the deepest aspect of Kant’ in his striving (and failing) to say the unsayable. To this extent, Adorno is able to adduce a link between Kant’s first *Critique* and his own dialectical philosophy, which, as he puts it, ‘consists in the effort to say what cannot be said’.²⁹

In his editor’s notes to Adorno’s Kant lectures, Rolf Tiedemann observes that Adorno’s last sentence in the above passage (‘Like the act of stammering [Kant’s philosophy consists in] the attempt to say what actually cannot be said’) is ‘evidently intended [as] a riposte to the last sentence of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*’:³⁰ ‘Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent’ (7).³¹ For Adorno, there is thus a clear distinction to be drawn between Kant and Wittgenstein:³² Kant acknowledges the contradictions of his thinking and attempts (unsuccessfully) to put the unsayable into words; Wittgenstein, by contrast, guards against the philosophical impulse to say what cannot be said and exhorts his readers to silence. This reading of Wittgenstein leads Adorno to put forward the following criticism in his *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*:

The task of philosophy, *pace* Wittgenstein, would be to say what cannot be said. The contradictory nature of this challenge is that of philosophy as such; it qualifies philosophy as dialectics even before it becomes ensnared in specific contradictions. The work of philosophical reflection on itself is to disentangle this paradox.³³

In contrast to Adorno, many of Wittgenstein’s Tractarian interpreters have attempted to highlight the similarities (rather than the differences) between Kant and Wittgenstein. Specifically, they argue that both philosophers share the common goal of attempting to mark out the limits of a faculty. P.M.S. Hacker, for instance, puts the point this way:

Wittgenstein was a “critical philosopher” in two more or less Kantian senses. First, he was concerned, early and late, with elucidating the limits of language. Where Kant had understood by “Kritik” the delineation of the limits of a faculty, Wittgenstein gave a linguistic turn to a form of critical philosophy. Where Kant

explored the limits of pure reason, Wittgenstein investigated the limits of language. Where Kant delimited knowledge in order to make room for faith, Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus*, delimited language in order to make room for ineffable metaphysics, ethics, and religion.³⁴

Despite arguing from radically different perspectives, it is possible to understand Adorno and Hacker as drawing similar conclusions about the nature of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Both see it as attempting to mark out a clear limit to what can be said. While Adorno (critically) describes Wittgenstein's final sentence in the *Tractatus* ('Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent') as a 'gesture of reverent authoritarian authenticity',³⁵ Hacker (sympathetically) argues that the activity of delimitation carried out in the book is one that is intimately bound up with its ethical and religious concerns.

Such readings, which argue that the *Tractatus* seeks to draw limits to what we can say (in order to demarcate what we *cannot* say, or to 'make room' for ineffable theories of ethics) are, I believe, misguided. On the dialectical reading of the *Tractatus* that I am putting forward, the book's aim is to encourage us to dispense with this picture of limits and the corollary picture of a realm of ineffable truths that exists beyond them. To begin exploring this view in more detail, I now want to look at how the idea of Wittgenstein as a philosopher of limits has come to inform certain modernist readings of the *Tractatus*.

Limits and modernism

In *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin situate the *Tractatus* in the context of Viennese thought and culture at the turn of the twentieth century. Not only do they interpret the work as an expression of the post-Kantian philosophy of the times, they also place it in a specific literary context. For Janik and Toulmin, the archetypal *fin-de-siècle* literary work is one that engages with the problem of 'the nature and the limits of language, expression and

communication'.³⁶ In Wittgenstein's *Vienna*, Hugo von Hofmannsthal's 'The Letter of Lord Chandos' is highlighted as providing the clearest expression of this struggle with language.³⁷ Numerous other texts are also cited: Rilke's autobiographical *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, Kafka's fragmentary short story *Description of a Struggle*, and Musil's philosophical novel *The Man Without Qualities*. Each of these works, Janik and Toulmin argue, expresses a 'concern with the incapability of language to explain men's innermost being to others'; they show that 'language cannot express what is most real [...] this is something which remains forever private in the depths of the person's subjectivity'.³⁸

The problems of communication and expression illustrated by these literary works and paralleled in other fields of art and culture – in music by Arnold Schönberg, in drama and letters by Karl Kraus, in architecture by Adolf Loos – set the stage 'for a *philosophical* critique of language, given in completely general terms'.³⁹ According to Janik and Toulmin, this critique of language [*Sprachkritik*] is articulated most powerfully by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*. On their reading, the *Tractatus* combines the general intellectual and linguistic preoccupations of *fin-de-siècle* literature and art with the specific problems of early twentieth century philosophy and science.⁴⁰ The book is thus to be read as a modernist work – one which attempts to draw the limits of meaningful expression in order to show the importance of the 'higher' spheres of ethics and aesthetics:

Wittgenstein [gave] scientific language a sure basis, while drawing an absolute distinction between what language *says* and what it *shows* – that is, what is "higher." On this interpretation, the *Tractatus* becomes an expression of a certain type of language mysticism that assigns a central importance in human life to art, on the ground that art alone can express the meaning of life.⁴¹

In *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*, Jameson also places the *Tractatus* in the context of artistic and literary modernism. Like Janik and Toulmin,

Jameson portrays Wittgenstein as an archetypal modernist author who seeks to draw the limits to what can meaningfully be said. In a chapter which begins by exploring Ferdinand de Saussure's struggle with the methodological and terminological limits of traditional linguistics,⁴² Jameson writes:

[I]t is difficult to escape the feeling that there is something archetypal about Saussure's silence. It is that same legendary and august renunciation of speech of which the gesture of Rimbaud is emblematic, but which recurs again and again in the early modern period in different guises and different forms, in the reticence of Wittgenstein, in Valéry's long abandonment of poetry for mathematics, in the testament of Kafka and in Hofmannsthal's 'Letter from Lord Chandos'.⁴³

Jameson is here alluding to the dramatic silences of modernism – what he refers to as 'the [...] great moments of verbal impairment'.⁴⁴ All of these moments, on his view, 'testify to a kind of geological shift in language itself, to the gradual deterioration in this transition period to new thought patterns, of the inherited terminology and even the inherited grammar and syntax'.⁴⁵

To read the *Tractatus* (as Janik/Toulmin and Jameson do) as a work that is engaged in a struggle with the limits of language (and consequently to read it as a work which concludes with a strict guarding of what cannot be said) is, I would suggest, to misunderstand the character of the book as a whole. Wittgenstein's aim in the *Tractatus* is not to demarcate any strict dividing line between what can and cannot be meaningfully expressed, rather it is to assist us in diagnosing the sources of our attraction to (amongst other things) *the very idea* of limits of language. In this respect, the notion of limits can be understood as something captivating, a block which simultaneously holds out the promise of *a beyond*, akin to the 'so-called curtain which is supposed to conceal the inner world' in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁴⁶ For Hegel, there is nothing behind the curtain (unless of course 'we go behind it ourselves'); however, there is something which nevertheless compels us

to look, to seek a true reality behind the appearance.⁴⁷ In a seminar of 1964, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan returns to this point when he recounts the story of the competing artists Zeuxis and Parrhasios:

In the classical tale of Zeuxis and Parrhasios, Zeuxis has the advantage of having made grapes that attracted the birds. The stress is placed not on the fact that these grapes were in any way perfect grapes, but on the fact that even the eye of the birds was taken in by them. This is proved by the fact that his friend Parrhasios triumphs over him for having painted on the wall a veil, a veil so lifelike that Zeuxis, turning towards him said, *Well, and now show us what you have painted behind it*. By this he showed that what was at issue was certainly deceiving the eye (*tromper l'œil*). A triumph of the gaze over the eye.⁴⁸

Here again we encounter the urge (on Zeuxis's part) to go beyond the perceived limit (the painted veil) to something which is hidden. Alighting in his manuscripts on this desire for a beyond, Wittgenstein writes: '[I]n so far as people think they can see the "limits of human understanding", they believe of course that they can see beyond these' – this, he says, 'satisfies a longing for the transcendent'.⁴⁹ For Hegel, Lacan and Wittgenstein then, it is the perception of the limit which is itself the cause of one wanting to go beyond it; and this wanting to go beyond is a metaphysical urge which arises from a dissatisfaction with the reality of appearances (what the later Wittgenstein terms the 'ordinary'). In the *Tractatus*, the perspective which the author encourages the reader to take up is, therefore, one where the very attachment to limits comes to be seen as an illusion of thought. The activity of throwing away the ladder requires one to reinterrogate remarks such as '*the limits of my language mean the limits of my world*' (5.6) and to ask oneself: what, precisely, is it about such pseudo-propositions which makes them so philosophically attractive?

Understood in this way, the *Tractatus* can be seen to have a dual character. On the one hand, it is a typical high modernist work – intellectually esoteric, ethically heroic, formally perfectionist; on the

other hand, it takes up a position beyond a number of modernist authors who, in the parlance of the *Investigations*, are ‘held [...] captive’ (*PI*, §115) by a particular picture of language. Where modernists like Eliot and Hofmannsthal see language as a cognitive prison-house which debars us from saying certain kinds of things, Wittgenstein sees no such finite boundaries to what can be said. On the contrary, his aim is to reveal how such pictures of limits and boundaries develop when we fail to understand ‘the logic of our language’ (4.003). Therefore, rather than simply placing the *Tractatus* in the stream of philosophical and literary modernism, I want to argue that we can also come to recognize it as a *therapeutic tool* which can assist us in diagnosing some of the problems of language, expression and communication that feature so centrally in modernist discourse.

The illusion of limits

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein’s first remarks about limits appear in the Preface. There he writes:

The book will, therefore, draw a limit to thinking, or rather – not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts; for, in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought).

The limit can, therefore, only be drawn in language and what lies on the other side of the limit will be simply nonsense.

(*TLP*, p. 27)

Numerous exegetes have attempted to unpack the details of these complex sentences. On certain traditional readings of the book, such remarks are interpreted as emphasizing the centrality of the notion of the limit or boundary [*Grenze*]. For instance, as Philip Shields argues, commenting on the above passage in his study *Logic and Sin*, ‘what is striking about

this passage is the prominence and rigor of “the limit”. That there is such a limit, and that it can be made “clear”, is an assumption which is never questioned in the *Tractatus*.⁵⁰ Similarly, for David Stern, “[i]n the preface to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein expressed his belief that he had arrived at the definitive “final solution” to the problems of philosophy. That confidence was based on his conviction that the book makes clear the limits of language by sharply demarcating what can be said – namely, factual assertion – and placing all philosophical theses about such matters as the nature of self and world, aesthetics, morality, or religion on the other side of the limit. The demarcation depends on a conception of language and logic that is not so much defended as presented in the text.”⁵¹

In opposition to these kinds of reading, I would argue that in the Preface Wittgenstein is clearly setting out the dialectical strategy which informs the *Tractatus* as a whole. We can see this by looking more closely at the passage cited above. There Wittgenstein begins by telling the reader that the aim of the book is to ‘draw a limit to thinking’. Almost immediately, however, he withdraws this account of the book’s aim. Having tempted the reader with the idea that she can draw a limit to thinking, Wittgenstein then says that this would be impossible, for in order to do so one would ‘have to be able to think both sides of this limit’ – that is, one would ‘have to be able to think what cannot be thought’. Hence, ‘[t]he limit can [...] *only* be drawn *in language* and what lies on the other side of the limit will be simply nonsense’ (*TLP*, p. 27).⁵² Here we thus see that the limit (*pace* Stern) is *not* a strict boundary which divides what can and what cannot be said. Instead, the limit is simply where *sense stops*;⁵³ and what lies on the other side of this limit is, as Wittgenstein puts it, not any kind of ineffable truth, but rather ‘*einfach Unsinn*’ (*TLP*, p. 26).

The remark that ‘[t]he limit can [...] *only* be drawn in language’ is important to our understanding of the *Tractatus* as a whole. Primarily, this remark signals that Wittgenstein is seeking to get readers to overcome the illusion that they can attain a perspective *outside* language, a perspective from which they can survey language as a whole. Understood in this way, there is a significant comparison to be drawn between the

remark that '[t]he limit can [...] only be drawn in language' and Wittgenstein's remark to Ficker that the 'book draws limits to the sphere of the ethical from the inside'.⁵⁴ Both of these remarks (which provide instructions for how to read the book) make clear that we *only* give the limit from inside [*von innen*], and not therefore via any theory which attempts to look at language or ethics 'from sideways on'.⁵⁵ In this respect, drawing limits in language will reveal itself to be a practical, clarificatory activity – one which consists, as Conant puts it, in 'harnessing the capacities for distinguishing sense from nonsense [...] implicit in the everyday [...] mastery of language that [we] already [possess]'.⁵⁶

Once we become clear, then, about 'the logic of our language' (*TLP*, p. 27) – and specifically once we see, going back to the view of nonsense outlined in chapter two, that there are no sentences which are *intrinsically* nonsensical (5.4733) – our temptation to provide a theoretical account of 'the limits of language' will begin to fall away. This does not mean, however, that our attachment to philosophical sentences, or our desire to utter ethical remarks, will simply disappear. Indeed, it might be said that our tendency to '*run up against the limits of language*' – where this idea of running up against the limit is understood *figuratively* as a description of what Cavell calls 'the human drive to transcend itself'⁵⁷ – will be one that 'doesn't have an end'.⁵⁸ Bringing out this different conception of limits in relation to ethics, Wittgenstein remarks:

[T]he tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language [...] Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science [...] But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it.⁵⁹

And again, in conversation with members of the Vienna Circle:

Man feels the urge to run up against the limits of language. [...] This running up against the limits of language is *ethics*. I think it is definitely important to put an end to all the claptrap about ethics –

whether intuitive knowledge exists, whether values exist, whether the good is definable. In ethics we are always making the attempt to say something that cannot be said, something that does not and never will touch the essence of the matter. [...] But the inclination, the running up against something, *indicates something*. St. Augustine knew that already when he said: What, you swine, you want not to talk nonsense! Go ahead and talk nonsense, it does not matter!⁶⁰

In these passages, Wittgenstein thus argues that ethical talk arises from the inclination to say something meaningful about life; however, whenever we try to make such assertions we invariably ‘run up against the limits of language.’⁶¹ Here, I would claim, Wittgenstein is using the term ‘limits’ in a figurative manner; and as Cavell points out, this use ‘works to suggest that thought is not confined *by* language (and its categories) but confined *to* language.’⁶² Such an understanding of limits can, then, be contrasted with the two other approaches to limits that we find in the early Wittgenstein: (i) the *metaphysical* idea of drawing the limits *of language*; and (ii) the *therapeutic* practice of drawing limits *in language*. In the first case, the limits of language operate restrictively: they prevent us from saying certain kinds of things and are therefore something which we seek to go beyond. In the second case, the limits of language are non-constraining: they do not predetermine the logical terrain of thought and therefore it makes no sense to speak of transcending them. On the latter view – which I argue is the one that Wittgenstein is operating with in the *Tractatus* – the limits are something which can be recognized only through an approach that works ‘from inside’; and, in this respect, they reveal themselves during the course of our everyday efforts to achieve linguistic and conceptual clarity.⁶³

The *Tractatus* and solipsism

Having argued that the *Tractatus* is a work which undermines, rather than endorses, the idea that there are fixed and necessary limits of language and thought, my intention, in the following sections, will be to

explore some of the issues raised at *Tractatus* 5.62. Here, and in the paragraphs that immediately follow, Wittgenstein introduces the theme of solipsism:

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.

[...]

This remark provides a key to the question, to what extent is solipsism a truth.

In fact what solipsism *means*, is quite correct, only it cannot be *said*, but it shows itself.

(5.6, 5.62)⁶⁴

The remarks on solipsism are among the most opaque and cryptic that we find in the *Tractatus*. Unsurprisingly, these remarks have given rise to a diverse and radically conflicting range of opinions among Wittgenstein's interpreters.⁶⁵ Before turning specifically to them, it will be helpful to provide some background to the issues involved.

In an essay entitled 'Solipsism and Subjectivism', David Bell observes that '[p]erhaps the single most insurmountable obstacle to face an advocate of solipsism is the widespread belief that the very act of advocating solipsism is itself somehow self-defeating'.⁶⁶ On this view, the difficulty one finds with solipsism 'is not any perceived inadequacy or inconsistency in what the solipsist *says*'; rather, it is 'the belief that there will always be a discrepancy between what the solipsist says and what he or she *does*'.⁶⁷ Such a view is summed up perspicuously by Russell in his 1927 text *An Outline of Philosophy*:

"Solipsism" [is] the theory that I alone exist. This is a view which is hard to refute, but still harder to believe. I once received a letter from a philosopher who professed to be a solipsist, but who was surprised that there were no others! Yet this philosopher was by way of believing that no one else existed. This shows that solipsism is not really believed even by those who think they are convinced of its truth.⁶⁸

A similar view to Russell's is articulated by Schopenhauer in *The World as Will and Representation*. For Schopenhauer, solipsism, although formally irrefutable, is nothing more than a 'sceptical sophism'. If the solipsist were serious in what he or she held to be true, then this would require *cure*⁶⁹ not refutation:

[Solipsism] regards as phantoms all phenomena outside its own will, just as practical egoism does in a practical respect; thus in it a man regards and treats only his person as a real person, and all others as mere phantoms. [Solipsism], of course, can never be refuted by proofs, yet in philosophy it has never been positively used otherwise than as a sceptical sophism, i.e., for the sake of appearance. As a serious conviction, on the other hand, it could be found only in a madhouse; as such it would then need not so much a refutation as a cure.⁷⁰

In contrast to these critical interpretations of solipsism, Wittgenstein (on a cursory reading at least) appears to adopt a much more charitable position. As David Pears thus writes: 'Sympathy is the most striking characteristic of Wittgenstein's treatment of solipsism. Other philosophers find the doctrine embarrassing, like a family ghost haunting the subject and sending down its value. But Wittgenstein treats it with respect and understanding. You might almost think that he was a solipsist himself or, at least, that he had been one.'⁷¹ In the wartime *Notebooks*, there are numerous remarks which suggest that Wittgenstein is subscribing to a solipsistic outlook. For instance, in an entry dated 23 May 1915, he writes: 'There really is only one world soul, which I for preference call *my* soul and as which alone I conceive what I call the souls of others.' This remark, Wittgenstein says, 'gives the key for deciding the way in which solipsism is a truth.'⁷² Later, on 12 August 1916, he asserts: 'The I makes its appearance in philosophy through the world's being *my* world.'⁷³ On 2 September 1916, Wittgenstein provides what is perhaps the most direct expression of solipsism that we find in the early *Notebooks*. In an entry recorded after a period of intense front-line fighting, he remarks: 'What has history to do with me? Mine is the first and only world! I want to report how *I* found the world.'⁷⁴

On the surface, this solipsistic way of speaking is repeated and developed in the *Tractatus*. Following the remark that ‘the world is *my* world’ (5.62), we read, at 5.621: ‘The world and life are one’;⁷⁵ and at 5.63: ‘I am my world. (The microcosm.)’⁷⁶ According to Hacker, these sections of the book demonstrate that Wittgenstein is putting forward ‘a doctrine [of] Transcendental Solipsism’;⁷⁷ this doctrine cannot, strictly speaking, be *said*; rather, it *shows* itself.⁷⁸ Here, however, it should be remembered that there is an important difference between rehearsing the solipsist’s litany and adopting his or her creed.⁷⁹ Therefore, whilst we might hear Wittgenstein in both the *Notebooks* and the *Tractatus* giving expression to a solipsistic way of looking at the world, this should not be taken as evidence of an endorsement of this view. Indeed, on the dialectical reading of the work which I am putting forward, the *Tractatus*’ engagement with the issue of solipsism is much more complex than it might at first appear.

Overcoming solipsism

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein’s remarks on solipsism are intimately bound up with his remarks on subjectivity. At 5.631, he writes: ‘The thinking, presenting subject; there is no such thing.’ At first blush, this statement looks like a straightforward rejection of the standard Kantian picture of the subject. However, in the paragraph that follows, this idea is taken in a radical and unexpected direction:

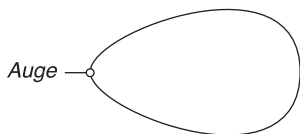
If I wrote a book “The world as I found it”, I should also have therein to report on my body and say which members obey my will and which do not, etc. This then would be a method of isolating the subject or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject: that is to say, of it alone in this book mention could *not* be made.

(5.631)

The activity of writing the book ‘The world as I found it’ is thus used as a method of isolating the subject; or more specifically of showing that

in an important sense the subject is not a part of the world. At 5.633, Wittgenstein illustrates this point with the use of another analogy – that of the eye and the field of sight. He argues that just as the eye is not to be found *within* the visual field, so the subject (the ‘I’) is not to be found *within* the world. The reasoning behind these remarks becomes clearer once we recall the opening sections of the *Tractatus*. At 1.1, Wittgenstein says: ‘The world is the totality of facts’; and these facts, in turn, are made up of a ‘combination of objects’ (2.01). Because the subject does not feature in this description of the world, it therefore cannot be a *part of* the world. How, then, are we to conceive of the subject in the context of Wittgenstein’s discussion of solipsism? An answer to this question appears at 5.641: ‘The philosophical I is not the man, not the human body or the human soul of which psychology treats, but the metaphysical subject, the limit – not a part of the world.’ For Wittgenstein, the ‘I’ of solipsism – ‘the metaphysical subject’ – is thus not *in* the world but is ‘the limit’ of the world (cf. 5.632).

In his discussion of these passages, Peter Sullivan argues that ‘the notion of the self-as-limit’ still retains the ‘I,’ but places it differently, “outside” the world.’⁸⁰ According to Sullivan, this move is only ‘intelligible’ if Wittgenstein is understood in these sections of the *Tractatus* as opposing ‘the “standard picture” of transcendental idealism: the subject, whose reality is unconditioned, limits the phenomenal world by structuring it in accordance with the requirements of its understanding.’⁸¹ Sullivan elaborates on these remarks by turning in more detail to Wittgenstein’s comments on the eye and the field of sight, and, in particular, to the latter’s observation that the field of sight does *not* have the following form:



(5.6331)

‘The most obvious question to ask here’, Sullivan writes,

is how the drawing goes wrong, or how the shape of the visual field ought to be drawn. And the obvious answer is that it cannot be done. To represent the visual field, rather than merely some region falling within the range of the eye, it has to be drawn from the perspective of the eye. But from this perspective the field has neither centre nor edge. There are no marks one can make on the paper. If the same holds for the knowing subject and the phenomenal world, the idealist explanation of a priority is undermined. That explanation locates the necessary structure of the known world in the subject, because it cannot be located in the world known.⁸²

That the visual field does not have a shape like the one drawn at 5.6331 is, as Wittgenstein himself says, ‘connected with the fact that no part of our experience is also a priori. Everything we see could also be otherwise. Everything we describe at all could also be otherwise. There is no order of things a priori’ (5.634). By opposing the idealist account of necessity and a priority, Wittgenstein then, according to Sullivan, dialectically opens up a space within which ‘realism’ can emerge: ‘Here we see that solipsism strictly carried out coincides with pure realism. The I in solipsism shrinks to an extensionless point and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it’ (5.64).

Whilst I broadly agree with Sullivan’s remarks here, it should be noted that the form of realism which emerges towards the end of the remarks on solipsism is, to say the least, highly problematic. First, one might point out that ‘far from having shrunk to an extensionless point’, the ‘I’ of solipsism (as 5.641 makes clear) comes ‘to occupy the place of the greatest importance. *It is* the limit, the author, the structure, the ground of all Being.’⁸³ In this respect, the realism announced at 5.64 begins to look like an extreme version of what Quentin Meillassoux terms ‘correlationism’. For Meillassoux, correlationism is ‘the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other’. Correlationism ‘consists in disqualifying the claim that it is possible to

consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another. Not only does it become necessary to insist that we never grasp an object “in itself”, in isolation from its relation to the subject, but it also becomes necessary to maintain that we can never grasp a subject that would not always-already be related to an object.’⁸⁴ In this respect, there is no reality independent of thought: ‘*to be is to be a correlate*’.⁸⁵ What correlationism runs up against however, according to Meillassoux, is its inability to deal with ‘ancestral statements’: statements which refer to ‘any reality anterior to the emergence of the human species – or even anterior to every recognized form of life on earth.’⁸⁶ Examples of such statements might include: earth accreted 4.56 billion years ago; our universe is 13.5 million years old; life originated on earth 3.5 billion years ago. The ancestral, Meillassoux argues, ‘does not designate an absence *in* the given, and *for* givenness, but rather an absence *of* givenness as such. [...] [It is] that which is *prior to givenness in its entirety*’.⁸⁷

Returning to Wittgenstein’s solipsist then, for whom the ‘world is *my* world’ (5.641), it would seem that a statement such as ‘life originated on earth 3.5 billion years ago’ might pose a significant challenge, since it appears to point to a world which is prior to givenness, a world which is independent of being thought. Here, however, we can make two points. First, there is *in principle* no reason why the solipsist should have any difficulty accepting ‘ancestral statements’ or of imagining for themselves a world anterior to thought; all these things can simply be seen as part of the world as the solipsist experiences it. Second, as Diamond suggests, insofar as a statement about the age of life on earth ‘says that something is the case’, the solipsist can translate it into an ‘experiential language’ which has herself at its centre.⁸⁸ However, whilst this language *appears* to offer the solipsist genuine satisfaction by bringing out her unique position, it does not ‘allow the solipsist to represent anything which is not representable in ordinary language’, and, in this respect, ‘the advantage it at first appears to have seems questionable.’⁸⁹ For Diamond, solipsism in the *Tractatus* progresses through a number of distinct stages. It begins by trying to express the uniqueness of the ‘I’ (‘I am my world’ (5.63)); then recognizing that the word ‘I’ always presupposes

'others', it moves finally to an experiential language which operates without the 'I' (the 'world is my world' (5.6.41)). Paradoxically, however, on Diamond's view, the collapse of solipsism coincides with the satisfaction of the desire to speak solipsism using the 'my' centred-experiential language. The solipsist, as Diamond puts it, comes to recognize that saying such things as 'The world is my world' is not what she wants; that 'what [she] wants is in a sense open to view'.⁹⁰

Here I fully agree with Diamond's conclusions. Solipsism is not an intellectual problem that can be resolved theoretically; rather, it requires a transformation of the solipsist's own philosophical desires – a process which is intimately connected to a transformation of the solipsist's relation with words. After attempting to express her solipsism in various different forms, the solipsist must finally – dialectically – come to see that there is nothing on the far side of language that they want to, but cannot, say. This recognition that there are no *constraining* limits of language is what would count, on the changed perspective, as *complete satisfaction*, as opposed to the pseudo-satisfaction granted by the use of experiential language. Such a change in outlook would also be ethically significant. Maintaining that the 'world is my world' or that 'there is only my experience' is, it seems clear, a way of closing down (ethical) possibilities, of denying that there might be a gap between the world as *I* find it and the world as it *might* be. Coming to see the solipsist's limits as a *fantasy of limits* would, then, be a move against such forms of psychic closure – a retreat from the 'I' and the 'my' and a returning to the essential openness of *our* life with others in language.

The *Tractatus*, loneliness and modernism

On the dialectical reading of the work which I am advocating, the *Tractatus* thus brings us to see how metaphysical solipsism – and the related picture of limits of language – finally collapses: the solipsist comes to see that this way of speaking is not what she *actually* wants. It might, however, be possible to approach the issue of solipsism

from a different perspective – one which takes us back, via a different route, to the subject of modernism. In her essay ‘The Uncaptive Eye: Solipsism in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*’, Floyd argues that there is indeed ‘a kind of solipsism’ that runs through the *Tractatus*, but that this ‘is a *personal*, not a transcendental or metaphysical one’.⁹¹ According to Floyd, this personal solipsism is intimately bound up with Wittgenstein’s life-long struggle with loneliness.⁹²

Throughout his life, and especially during the period in which the *Tractatus* was being composed, Wittgenstein experienced both separateness from his environment and alienation from those around him. In a memoir recalling their first meeting in 1914, Ficker describes Wittgenstein as ‘a picture of stirring loneliness at the first glance’.⁹³ In his diary, David Pinsent (a close friend) also notes how Wittgenstein ‘suffered from terrific loneliness (mental – not physical)’;⁹⁴ and how he planned to ‘exile himself and live for some years right away from everybody [...] a hermit’s life’.⁹⁵ During this period, Wittgenstein also struggled with thoughts of suicide. In a letter to his friend Paul Engelmann, he writes: ‘I have continually thought of taking my own life, and the idea still haunts me sometimes. *I have sunk to the lowest point*’.⁹⁶ In his wartime *Notebooks*, Wittgenstein thus considered how for him investigating suicide could prove lethal, ‘like investigating mercury vapour in order to comprehend the nature of vapours’.⁹⁷

The existential, psychological and cultural dimensions of Wittgenstein’s loneliness have been explored, most notably, by Louis Sass.⁹⁸ According to Sass, there is clear evidence of a ‘schizoid’ (or ‘schizothymic’) tendency in Wittgenstein’s early writings.⁹⁹ For Sass, it is characteristic of schizoid persons that they ‘experience themselves as not at home in the world or with others, and they feel divided within themselves, whether as a mind divorced from the body or as two selves interacting as if at a distance’.¹⁰⁰ Among such persons, Sass argues, ‘[t]here is a tendency to feel [...] at odds with, at a distance from, or otherwise not at one with one’s self, one’s body, or with the customs and practices of one’s society’.¹⁰¹ In addition, ‘[t]here is also a particular proclivity for experiences of derealization and depersonalization,

whereby the world, other people, or the self comes to seem devoid of the normal sense of reality or emotional resonance.¹⁰² As Sass observes, there is clear evidence of these characteristics throughout Wittgenstein's *Notebooks*. For instance, during the war, and especially during periods of intense front-line conflict, Wittgenstein emphasizes a division between mind and body. He returns again and again to the idea that the only significant life is the life of the mind ('The life of knowledge');¹⁰³ and thus that his body is in some way superfluous: 'The human body [...] my body [...] is a part of the world among others, among beasts, plants, stones [...] Whoever realizes this will not want to procure a pre-eminent place for his own body or for the human body.'¹⁰⁴ In numerous diary passages, Wittgenstein also expresses his desire for complete detachment from the external world. As he puts it in an entry for 11 June 1916: 'I can only make myself independent of the world – and so in a certain sense master it – by renouncing any influence on happenings.'¹⁰⁵ During this period, Wittgenstein is also known to have repeated to himself the following message: 'Don't be dependent on the external world and then you have no fear of what happens in it.'¹⁰⁶ This longing for detachment is, according to Sass, intimately bound up with Wittgenstein's search for the condition of 'absolute safety'. The term 'absolute safety' is used by Wittgenstein in his 1929 'Lecture on Ethics' to describe an experience which could be used to make sense of the idea of 'absolute or ethical value'.¹⁰⁷

In his study *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought*, Sass suggests that the key features of the schizoid personality – the tendency towards feelings of inner dividedness, detachment and loneliness – can be illuminated through a comparison with certain works of literary and artistic modernism.¹⁰⁸ In Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the hero of the story, Stephen Dedalus, speaks of the artist's defence as 'silence, exile, and cunning'; and he accepts that this requires one '[n]ot only to be separate from all others but to have not even one friend'.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, in Kafka's late short story 'Investigations of a Dog', the dog-narrator describes his experience of the world as '[s]olitary and withdrawn, with nothing to

occupy me save my hopeless but, as far as I am concerned, indispensable little investigations'.¹¹⁰ Whilst he does not explore direct connections between Wittgenstein and these narrators, Sass does argue that Wittgenstein (especially in his early writings) can be seen as an 'emblematic' modernist.¹¹¹ At the same time, however, Sass claims that Wittgenstein is 'unusual' in the degree to which he criticizes his own schizoid tendencies: 'there is no person who is more acutely aware than [Wittgenstein] of the potentially misleading as well as devalizing effects of such removal, no person who yearns more deeply for the condition of engagement that is its antithesis and its antidote. [...] [W]e might say that Wittgenstein [...] is [...] the most antischizoid of schizoids – a person who both epitomizes and attacks the forms of inwardness and separation that are the lot of the modern human being'.¹¹²

Approaching Wittgenstein in terms of this dialectic of detachment and engagement can be a useful *preliminary* strategy when it comes to placing his early writings (including *Notebooks 1914–1916*) within the sphere of modernism. Sass's method of biographically framing Wittgenstein's intellectual concerns also allows us to situate the themes of alienation and loneliness, which appear in the latter's work, in a number of concrete material contexts, especially war, exile and personal isolation. Sass's argument becomes far less persuasive, however, when it attempts to combine its modernist-psychological insights with a traditional-ineffability reading of the *Tractatus* itself. Sass argues, for example, that '[Wittgenstein] was preoccupied with foundational matters and the unsayable and tended to identify these with what is most important in life'.¹¹³ He then goes on to claim that Wittgenstein puts forward the quasi-modernist 'doctrine of showing',¹¹⁴ and that herein we find a 'compromise between Wittgenstein's schizoid yearnings [...] and his desire to overcome or repair certain schizoid potentialities'.¹¹⁵ The problems with such an approach are essentially twofold. First, it treats an autonomous philosophical-literary work as the mere *product* of the author's own existential concerns – seeing the apparent 'theories' expounded within the book as attempts to resolve these subjective problems. Second, it fails

to take seriously what Wittgenstein himself says about the work; namely, that whoever understands *him* will recognize that the sentences of the book are simply nonsense. Therefore, contrary to Sass, it would seem that we cannot speak about the doctrines of the *Tractatus* as 'standing proxy'¹¹⁶ for Wittgenstein's schizoid and antischizoid tendencies, because, put simply, there are *no doctrines* about which to speak.

Understanding the *Tractatus* in terms of its transformative aim is, then, to understand its relation to alienated subjectivity from a different point of view. Rather than reading the work as an expression of 'solitude' or 'splendid isolation',¹¹⁷ we can see it instead as inviting one to *overcome* feelings of loneliness and estrangement – feelings which are, as I have previously argued, generated by the modern world and exacerbated by the impulse to philosophize. Such an approach opens up, once again, the question of the book's relationship to literary modernism. In the next part of this chapter, I will argue that rather than viewing this relationship in terms of a set of direct or indirect parallels, we can instead *use* Wittgenstein's ideas and methods to inform our thinking about modernism. Specifically, I will show how the *Tractatus* – itself a high modernist work – can be seen as providing a critique of the types of linguistic bewitchment and alienation that we encounter in certain works of modernist literature.

The *Tractatus* and modernism reconsidered

Modernism's deepest loneliness is rooted in its feeling of dissatisfaction with everyday or ordinary language. This dissatisfaction finds itself expressed in a number of different and often radically contradictory ways. On the one hand, we find a number of key modernist writers attempting to emancipate,¹¹⁸ to clarify,¹¹⁹ or to purify¹²⁰ language, because, as they see it, language is being blocked, denatured or contaminated by the modern world. On the other hand, we find many writers preoccupied with the acute failure of language in the face of modern experience;¹²¹ and we thus see in their work a turning towards

the themes of ineffability and silence.¹²² Both of these trends (which can occur simultaneously as well as independently) perceive everyday language to be fundamentally inadequate. Such language, as the surrealist writer André Breton observes, ‘reveals itself to be increasingly powerless to provoke the emotive shock in man which really makes his life meaningful’.¹²³ Consequently, for many of the advanced literary practitioners of the early twentieth century, this language must be either painstakingly reformed or rejected entirely.

Numerous attempts have been made to locate the *Tractatus* somewhere on this modernist-linguistic spectrum. In addition to the ‘limits of language’ readings explored earlier on in this chapter, exegetes have interpreted the work as striving towards the ideal of ‘linguistic purity’¹²⁴ or as attempting to express ‘[t]he disenchantment of language, its systematic failure to put experience into words’.¹²⁵ This latter reading suggests certain affinities with Pound. In his 1914 essay ‘Vorticism’, Pound writes:

THREE YEARS AGO in Paris I got out of a “metro” train at La Concorde, and saw suddenly a beautiful face, and then another and another, and then a beautiful child’s face, and then another beautiful woman, and I tried all that day to find words for what this had meant to me, and I could not find any words that seemed to me worthy, or as lovely as that sudden emotion [...] The “one image poem” is a form of super-position, that is to say, it is one idea set on top of another. I found it useful in getting out of the impasse in which I had been left by my metro emotion. I wrote a thirty line poem, and destroyed it because it was what we call work “of second intensity.” Six months later I made a poem half that length; a year later I made the following *hokku*-like sentence:— “The apparition of these faces in the crowd: Petals, on a wet, black bough.”¹²⁶

At one point in his diaries, Wittgenstein appears to share Pound’s sense of a modernist-linguistic impasse when he writes: ‘We are struggling with language. We are engaged in a struggle with language’.¹²⁷ However, to read the *Tractatus* as typically modernist in this way is, I would contend, ‘to mistake the bait for the hook’¹²⁸ – that is, to mistake the

ideas which the book places under scrutiny for those which it advocates. Whilst we might hear Wittgenstein *lending voice* to certain modernist fantasies and fears about language (such as the fantasy of 'perfect expressiveness'¹²⁹ and the fear of 'inexpressiveness'¹³⁰), we need also to bear in mind that in the context of the book as a whole such ideas are deeply problematic. Indeed, on the reading of the work which I am advocating, the aim of the *Tractatus* is to help readers overcome such linguistic confusions by bringing them to see that discourse about the so-called 'problems of language' is, in a certain sense, empty.

A more dialectical way of understanding the relation between the *Tractatus* and modernism is to see the former as a kind of immanent critique. The work's intention is not to refute any particular position on language from outside; rather, its method is to occupy the internal logic of a position in order to bring it to self-consciousness regarding its own illusoriness. A clear example of this type of activity can be seen if we consider the aspiration to perfect expressiveness.¹³¹ In modernist writing, this aspiration takes a number of diverse forms. In Mallarmé, it begins with the idea that language is essentially a fallen medium. As he thus writes, making an explicit connection between linguistic imperfection and the multiplicity of languages: 'Languages are imperfect because multiple; the supreme language is missing. Inasmuch as thought consists of writing without pen and paper [...] without the sound of the immortal Word, the diversity of languages on earth means that no one can utter words which would bear the miraculous stamp of the Truth Herself Incarnate.'¹³² However, precisely because of universal linguistic imperfection, the poet is called forth to atone 'for the sins of languages [...] [to come] nobly to their aid.'¹³³ The poet thus dreams 'of words brilliant at once in meaning and sound.'¹³⁴ '[O]ur present task', as Mallarmé writes, 'is to find a way of transposing the symphony to the Book [...] the true source of music must not be the elemental sound of brasses, strings, or wood winds, but the intellectual and written word in all its glory – Music of perfect fullness and clarity, the totality of universal relationships.'¹³⁵

In the preface to the anthology *Some Imagist Poets*,¹³⁶ Mallarmé's idea of a perfect symphonic language is replaced by a new vision of perfect expressiveness – *absolute clarity*:

The essentials of all great poetry, indeed of all great literature [...] are simply these': 'To present an image (hence the name: "Imagist"). We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic poet, who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art. [...] To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite. [...] Finally, most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry.¹³⁷

According to certain traditional exegetes, it is this desire for perfect expressiveness which Wittgenstein is articulating (from the philosophical point of view) in the *Tractatus*. As Russell thus writes:

In order to understand Mr Wittgenstein's book, it is necessary to realize what is the problem with which he is concerned. In the part of his theory which deals with Symbolism he is concerned with the conditions which would have to be fulfilled by a logically perfect language.¹³⁸

(*TLP*, p. 7)

This idea of Wittgenstein as striving after a logically perfect or ideal language is, I believe, one which is radically mistaken. If we grasp the *Tractatus* in terms of its authorial strategy (rather than its manifest content) then we come to see that the desire to make language more precise or exact is itself something that the work is inviting us to overcome.¹³⁹ This desire typically arises out of the belief that our words cannot adequately express what it is we want to say.¹⁴⁰ We feel that there is an unbridgeable gap between what we *mean* and what we *utter*.¹⁴¹ For Wittgenstein, however, the problem is not with our words; rather it is with our confused relation to them, and, more specifically, with our temptation to imagine that there are fixed and necessary limits of language, and, consequently, that there is a realm of sublime truths that exists beyond them. It is precisely this reified picture of our life with words which, in the Preface to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein describes as resulting from a failure to understand 'the logic of our language'.

In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein makes the following point about ideal and ordinary conceptions of language:

[I]t is clear that every sentence in our language “is in order as it is”. That is to say, we are not *striving after* an ideal, as if our ordinary vague sentences had not yet got a quite unexceptionable sense, and a perfect language awaited construction by us.

(PI, §98)

Interpreters who emphasize the notion of a decisive break between Wittgenstein’s early and later writings overlook the fact that such ideas are already clearly evident in the *Tractatus*. For instance, as Wittgenstein writes at section 5.5563: ‘In fact, all the propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order.’¹⁴² This remark – like the remark from the *Investigations* – can be taken as an affirmation of our everyday, ordinary language; a clear indication that *language itself* does not stand in need of logical reform.

In the *Tractatus*, the ordinary is not, as it is in the *Investigations*, the medium of philosophical thinking.¹⁴³ It is, however, the place to which we are returned once we are able to place in clearer focus our attachment to certain captivating metaphysical pictures of language.¹⁴⁴ Typically, the temptation is to think of the ordinary in terms of the familiar, the pedestrian or that which is bound up with so-called ‘common sense’. Nothing, though, could be further from Wittgenstein’s own understanding.¹⁴⁵ Although Wittgenstein does not, in the *Tractatus*, provide a fully worked-out definition of the ordinary, he does point towards its infinite complexity. As he writes at 4.002: ‘Everyday language is a part of the human organism and is no less complicated than it.’¹⁴⁶ This remark, as I understand it, serves to bring out the intimate connection between word and life, language and the living body. Because language is so closely bound up with our material selves, the struggle to make sense with our everyday, ordinary words is, we might say, inseparable from what it means to lead a fully human life. From this perspective, the attachment to forms of perfect expressiveness can be

seen as an evasion – as an attempt to relieve ourselves of the ethical task of clarifying our own utterances. For Wittgenstein, as I read him, coming to ‘see the world aright’ (6.54)¹⁴⁷ thus requires us to break the spell of the ideal; and this can only be achieved through an acknowledgement and an acceptance of the words which we already possess.

Towards a Literary Use of Wittgenstein: The *Tractatus* and Kafka's 'Der Bau'

Longfellow:

*In the elder days of art,
Builders wrought with greatest care
Each minute and unseen part,
For the gods are everywhere.*

(This could serve me as a motto.)

– Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*¹

Throughout this study, one of my concerns has been to show that the *Tractatus* is not simply an object of analysis, but also a *means* of interpretation – a therapeutic tool which offers itself up for application in a variety of contexts. In the previous chapter, for example, I argued that the *Tractatus* can be read as an immanent critique: a work which occupies the internal logic of various modernist perspectives on language in order to bring us to see the limits of these perspectives. In this concluding chapter, I want to move further with this idea of the *Tractatus*-as-tool and to explore the implications that it might have for our reading of modernist literary works. Through a close reading of Franz Kafka's short story 'The Burrow' ['*Der Bau*'], my intention will be to demonstrate how the *Tractatus* – or more specifically Wittgenstein's Tractarian *method* – can provide us with a new critical perspective: one which enables us to bring to the fore the conceptual knots and ethical puzzles within Kafka's richly suggestive tale.²

Kafka's 'The Burrow'³ begins with the following words: 'I have completed the construction of my burrow and it seems to be successful.'⁴

These words are spoken by the narrator of the story – a small animal, possibly a badger⁵ – who lives alone in the burrow and who describes himself as ‘a connoisseur and prizer of burrows, a hermit, a lover of peace’ (337). We first encounter the narrator in his subterranean home – a self-contained refuge from the outside world. He speaks in elaborate detail about the construction and the maintenance of the ‘manifold passages and rooms’ (333) which he inhabits, and he tells of the satisfaction which he derives from his labours:

Sometimes I lie down and roll about in the [burrow] with pure joy [...] [T]o possess a burrow like mine [...] is great good fortune [...] Every hundred yards I have widened the passages into little round cells; there I can curl myself up in comfort and lie warm. There I sleep the sweet sleep of tranquillity, of satisfied desire, of achieved ambition; for I possess a house (327).

This atmosphere of security and peace is, however, one which does not endure. Rather than living a free and blissful life in his underground labyrinth, the narrator is haunted by the fear that the burrow is less than impenetrable and that an external force may, at any time, attack and ‘destroy everything for good’ (325). As he thus speculates: ‘[M]ay I not be attacked from some quite unexpected quarter? I live in peace in the inmost chamber of my house, and meanwhile the enemy may be burrowing his way slowly and stealthily straight toward me’ (326). Despite his efforts to reorganize and fortify the burrow, the narrator remains convinced of ‘great dangers’ (329). The enemies which he believes are advancing towards him are not only ‘external’, there are also creatures ‘of the inner earth’ which go unseen and which ‘not even legend can describe’ (326). Reflecting on his situation, the narrator thus concedes: ‘even now, at the zenith of my life, I can scarcely pass an hour in complete tranquillity [...] I am vulnerable, and in my dreams I often see a greedy muzzle sniffing around [the burrow] persistently’ (325).

As the story progresses, the narrator’s relationship with his burrow becomes increasingly complex. At first, he had persuaded himself that the underground structure had been built primarily as a means for his

protection. However, it soon becomes clear that he and the burrow are in fact intimately connected. When, at one point in the story, the narrator ventures outside, he finds himself a 'hiding place' from where he is able to 'keep watch' on the entrance to his dwelling 'for whole days and nights' (334). Observing the burrow from this vantage point, he remarks: 'At such times it is as if I were not so much looking at my house as at myself sleeping, and had the joy of being in a profound slumber and simultaneously of keeping vigilant guard over myself' (334). The union of burrow and creator is emphasized again, later in the story: 'there is no need for me even to take thought to know what the burrow means to me; I and the burrow belong so indissolubly together [...] nothing can part us' (340). On returning home from his excursion to the outside world, the narrator articulates this inseparability in even more impassioned terms: 'Is it for your sake, ye passages and rooms, and you, Castle Keep, above all, that I have come back [...] What do I care for danger now that I am with you? You belong to me, I to you, we are united; what can harm us?' (342)

The rhetorical question here is an ominous one, for it marks the beginning of a new phase of the narrator's disquiet. After carrying out an inspection of the burrow's passages and falling into a deep sleep, he is awoken by a noise. At first this noise is 'almost inaudible' (343) – a faint 'whistling' or 'piping' (344) which the narrator attributes to the burrowing of capricious 'small fry' (343). Eventually, however, the noise grows louder and begins to pervade the entire burrow: 'wherever I listen, high or low, at the roof or the floor, at the entrance or in the corners, everywhere, everywhere, I hear the same noise' (347). Having failed to locate the 'swarm of little creatures' (347) which he suspects of producing the noise, the narrator then speculates that the sound might instead be attributable to an omnipotent 'great beast [...] dangerous beyond all one's powers of conception' (353). Despite numerous signs contradicting this hypothesis, the narrator continues to attach himself to his theory. The story concludes with the narrator contemplating his own demise at the hands of 'the beast':

For the rest I try to unriddle the beast's plans. Is it on its wanderings, or is it working on its own burrow? If it is on its wanderings then

perhaps an understanding with it might be possible. If it should really break through to the burrow, I shall give it some of my stores and it will go on its way again. It will go its way again, *a fine story!* (358)⁶

Kafka's writings stand in the same relation to conventional fiction as Wittgenstein's do to conventional philosophy. A central feature of the texts of both authors is that they effectuate a fundamental transformation in the outlook of the reader. Whilst the latter teach the reader how to pass from disguised to undisguised nonsense (*PI*, §464), the former, as Adorno observes, work by 'collaps[ing] aesthetic distance', by shaking 'the contemplative relation between text and reader [...] to its very roots': '[Kafka's] texts are designed not to sustain a constant distance between themselves and their victim but rather to agitate his feelings to a point where he fears that the narrative will shoot towards him like a locomotive'.⁷ In their study *Kafka: Toward A Minor Literature*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari suggest an interpretive framework for Kafka's short stories. They argue that the stories (another component of Kafka's 'writing machine') are 'essentially animalistic' (even though not all of them feature animals).⁸ This is because '[a]ccording to Kafka, the animal is "the object *par excellence* of the story: to try to find a way out, to trace a line of escape."⁹ In the stories, however, the protagonists of the narratives invariably 'bump up against a *no-way out* of the animal way out, an impasse of the line of escape'.¹⁰ Therefore, whilst they are uniquely placed to imagine a path out of their situation, Kafka's animals remain blocked: they are 'incapable of following' this path or of 'making it [their] own'.¹¹

I will return to this idea of a stalled dialectic shortly; first, though, I want to set in place a number of biographical and conceptual details. Kafka's story was written in the winter of 1923–24, shortly before the author's death, and a year after the publication of the *Tractatus*. Although there is no record of Kafka having read Wittgenstein's work, we do find mention of Kafka in an encounter that takes place in the late 1940s between Wittgenstein and his student G.E.M. Anscombe. At the time Anscombe was, as Ray Monk notes, 'an enthusiastic admirer of Kafka,

and in an effort to share her enthusiasm she lent Wittgenstein some of his novels to read. "This man", said Wittgenstein, returning them, "gives himself a great deal of trouble not writing about his trouble."¹² Wittgenstein's point here, somewhat cryptically stated, appears to be that Kafka's style is evasive, in contrast to a modernist like Joyce, whose *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Wittgenstein calls 'a remarkable piece of writing'.¹³

Whilst the remark on Kafka may not in itself yield any significant critical insights, further and indeed more intriguing connections are brought to light once we turn to 'The Burrow' itself. The first thing we notice about Kafka's narrator is that he is an artist – a modernist artist – and more specifically an architect. The construction of the burrow, he notes, 'involves very laborious calculation, and the sheer pleasure of the mind in its own keenness is often the sole reason why one keeps it up' (325). The burrow is a 'beautiful thing' (327), which brings the 'pure joy' of 'achieved ambition' (327); but still the architect-narrator wishes to take his art to the next level of sophistication: '[I] dream my dream of a completely perfect burrow [...] with closed eyes I behold with delight perfect or almost perfect structural devices for enabling me to slip out and in unobserved' (339). In 1926, following a period as an elementary schoolteacher in rural Austria, Wittgenstein returned to Vienna to design and build for his sister Margaret ('Gretl') a house on Kundmannsgasse, in the city's Third District. The architectural project, undertaken with Engelmann, was overseen by Wittgenstein with 'an almost fanatical exactitude'. At one point in the proceedings the latter demanded that one of the ceilings be removed and raised by an additional three centimetres; on another occasion he scolded a locksmith for asking: 'Tell me, Herr Ingenieur, does a millimetre here or there really matter so much to you?'¹⁴ The construction which emerged was, according to Wittgenstein's sister Hermine, 'a dwelling for the gods': a house which 'embodied logic' and a vision of 'perfection and monumentality'.¹⁵ In his diaries of 1931, Wittgenstein writes: '[w]orking in philosophy – like work in architecture in many respects – is really more a working on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's way

of seeing things.¹⁶ He goes on to suggest that 'good architecture' is a *part of language*: 'it expresses a thought. It makes one want to respond with a gesture.'¹⁷ Reflecting, however, on the Kundmannngasse Haus in 1940, Wittgenstein observes: 'the house I built for Gretl is the product of a decidedly sensitive ear and *good* manners, an expression of great *understanding* (of a culture, etc.). But *primordial* life, wild life striving to erupt into the open – that is lacking. And so you could say it isn't *healthy*.'¹⁸ Here Wittgenstein's description of his own *unhealthy* modernism is, interestingly, fully consistent with Freud's thesis that civilization (culture) requires certain forms of repression, or, more specifically, a deflection of the instinctual drives to socially useful (and thus acceptable) modes of activity and expression.¹⁹

In the present analysis, I would like to begin by taking up Wittgenstein's remark from 1931: 'work in architecture [...] is really more a working on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's way of seeing things.' This remark already suggests a contrast between a certain kind of ethico-therapeutic (architectural) labour and the kind of agitated (architectural) labour carried out by Kafka's narrator. How, then, might we distinguish between these two modes of activity? What is it about the narrator's way of seeing things that leads him, in Walter Benjamin's words, to '[flit] from one worry to the next'?²⁰

The story itself divides almost exactly into two parts: the first part is concerned with describing the burrow and with the narrator's fear that 'external enemies' are threatening his refuge; the second part focuses on the narrator's preoccupation with the intrusive 'noise'. In both parts of the story the affective state which dominates is anxiety. As a mood [*Stimmung*], anxiety has at least three dimensions: ontological, temporal and spatial. Regarding its ontological dimension, as Heidegger notes, anxiety is phenomenally different from fear. With fear we become afraid in the face of this or that particular thing-in-the-world (the dentist's drill or the anaesthetist's needle, for example) – a present-at-hand or ready-to-hand entity which brings itself close and threatens a definite detrimentality.²¹ Anxiety, by contrast, is not *about* anything, it is

completely indefinite: 'Anxiety is indeed anxiety in the face of ... but not in the face of this or that thing. Anxiety in the face of ... is always anxiety for ... but not for this or that. The indeterminateness of that in the face of which and for which we become anxious is no mere lack of determination but rather the essential impossibility of determining it.'²² As Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*: '*That in the face of which one has anxiety [das Wovor der Angst] is Being-in-the-world as such.*'²³ On anxiety's temporal dimension, Ernst Bloch has suggested that it belongs to the category of 'expectant emotions'.²⁴ Bloch contrasts 'expectant emotions' (such as anxiety, hope and belief) with 'filled emotions' (such as greed, envy or admiration), and argues that the former differ in terms of '*the incomparably greater anticipatory character* in their intention, their substance and their object'. For Bloch, 'all emotions refer to the horizon of time [...] but whereas the filled emotions only have an unreal future – i.e. one in which objectively nothing new happens – the expectant emotions essentially imply a real future [...] that of the Not-Yet'.²⁵ Anxiety's spatial dimension can be looked at from a number of different perspectives. First, anxiety always occurs within a particular set of spatial contexts: psychological, visual, auditory, olfactory, historical, cultural, geographical; it can also, in the case of agoraphobia or claustrophobia, be motivated by explicit spatial concerns. Second, turning to the discourse of psychoanalysis, we might say, following Freud, that anxiety (in instances of neurosis) is a '*freely floating*' mode of apprehensiveness, 'ready to attach itself temporarily [...] to any possibility that may freshly arise'.²⁶ It is also characterized by a process of '*projection*' whereby unwanted feelings or desires are expelled from the self and attributed to another subject or thing.²⁷ Additionally, for Freud, the subject's first encounter with anxiety involves a specific kind of spatial displacement: the transition from inside to outside during the '*act of birth*'.²⁸

Returning to the story, we find numerous instances in which the temporal and spatial dimensions of the narrator's anxiety are dramatized. Throughout the narrative, his disquiet remains entirely within the anticipatory sphere: nothing bad *actually* happens to *him*;

indeed, it is he who is the predator, stockpiling dead rodents in his 'stores' (328). The fear is thus that some Other *could* make its way in to the burrow and 'destroy everything' (325); or, towards the end, that the great beast has *probably* made several circles around the burrow in preparation for a final attack (354). In this respect, the catastrophe is *always about to arrive*: the fact that it has still not taken place (after an unspecified number of 'years' (327)) does not lead to the (logical) conclusion that it will not happen, but rather to the view that *when* it happens the outcome will be terrible 'beyond all one's powers of conception' (353).

In his essay 'The Burrow of Sound', Mladen Dolar explores the spatial dialectic of inside/outside and how the narrator's quest for complete security is always bound to remain elusive. As Dolar writes:

The burrow is a retreat, the secret hideaway most carefully protected against all outer threats. It is the inside that should be clearly separated from the outside. [...] [T]he biggest and most immediate problem is that of the entry/exit, the neuralgic spot of transition between the inside and the outside of the burrow that presents the most vulnerable point. [...] No matter how much the entry is hidden and overlaid by moss, whenever [the narrator] has to emerge from his burrow or go back inside, it involves the moment of greatest danger and requires a series of anguished strategic manoeuvres. The moment of transition is always the moment of exposure to risk that cannot be avoided [...]

This vulnerable point of entry/exit/transition is only a condensation to one point of something massively present overall. The burrow as a whole is far from being a safe haven. It is at all points the space of total exposure to the Other. The complex architecture of meandering labyrinths has been entirely dictated by the invisible enemy and its possible stratagems, by its omnipresent invisible threat. Quite literally, the inner safe space of [the narrator] is the space shaped by the Other, by the supposition of the external menacing Other.²⁹

The narrator thus runs up against a paradox: the more he works to secure the burrow, the more it is haunted by the ghostly presence of the hostile

Other. In this sense, the act of constructing becomes a simultaneous process of dismantling: inside becomes outside. As Dolar continues: 'There is no inside that could escape the outside, and [the narrator] occupies the space of the constantly shifting lag between the two: the very principle of spatialization in which it tries to find its abode at the interstice of the inner and the outer.'³⁰ Whilst the narrator's anxiety is structured by this problem of spatialization (inside/outside), it is exacerbated by the fact that his aesthetic sensibility has given way to what Nietzsche calls 'the insatiable knowledge drive'.³¹ The burrow (with the exception of the Castle Keep) is described as the product of 'intellectual' labour; planning decisions are made according to strict 'calculations'; and time within is spent attempting to 'discover a universal principle or an infallible method' (336) of moving from inside to outside. This knowledge-seeking mode of subjectivity becomes especially apparent in relation to the noise. It is significant that the narrator first encounters the noise as he emerges from sleep (343) – poised, as Walter Benjamin might put it, on the threshold between dream and awakening in which certain dream elements still persist. The narrator's immediate response to what he diagnoses as 'an almost inaudible whistling' is to rationalize it: there must be something outside trying to burrow its way inside and the only way to eradicate it is to 'locate the place of disturbance by experimental excavations' (343) and 'systematic investigation' (344). The noise is an enigmatic 'problem' to which the narrator is (at first) attracted: 'I deduce its cause, and now I am on fire to discover whether my conclusion is valid' (344). One noise, however, quickly divides into two, and two possible centres (345); this hypothesis then gives way to the view that there must be 'a huge swarm of little creatures' producing sounds on their wanderings past the burrow (348). Finally, we arrive with the theory of an omnipotent 'great beast' (353). What is most striking about this final section of the story is the clash between the narrator's emphasis on 'truth' (348) and his desire to reinstate 'reason [...] on the throne' (349), and his clear descent into absolute unreason. Here two brief examples will illustrate the point. First, the narrator repeatedly insists upon silence ('I must have silence in my passages' (343)), and speaks of himself as a 'guardian' of 'peace' (346), failing to recognize that, by his

own 'scientific' lights, total silence is impossible: even if it is merely the noises emanating from one's own body (the pounding of the heart, the breeze of inhalation/exhalation), sound is always present. Second, he speaks of the noise as being produced by a single beast who is advancing ever closer; however, if this is the case then how 'can [it] be heard everywhere and always at the same strength, and moreover uniformly, both by day and night' (353)? The basic laws of physics dictate that the intensity of a sound *increases* as the space between sound-source and recipient (hearer) *decreases*. There are, to be sure, brief interludes of clarity: 'I have had enough of discoveries; I let everything slide; I would be quite content if I could only still the conflict going on within me' (352). Soon enough, though, the desire for 'truth,' 'answers' and 'hypotheses' returns: 'But surely the noise is caused by the channels bored by the small fry? Is not that my considered opinion? [...] [O]ne is not at liberty to make *a priori* assumptions, but must wait until one finds the cause' (353). Faced with the impossible challenge of trying to 'unriddle' the plans of the beast (358), the narrator's abstract intellectualization eventually descends into outright incoherence: 'I have played with the idea that the beast can be heard at such a great distance because it works so furiously; it burrows as fast through the ground as another can walk on the open road; the ground still trembles at its burrowing when it has ceased; this reverberation and the noise of the boring itself unite into one great sound' (353).

It should perhaps be clear by now that the apparent Other terrorizing the narrator is in fact (on one reading at least) a projection of the narrator himself – his own dark spirit let loose upon the burrow in the form of a demonic spectral fantasy. Here, however, I would like to suggest that, grasped dialectically, this projection can itself be seen as potentially positive, even utopian. For the narrator's *true* Other – the *logical* negation of himself as alienated being-in-the-world – would in fact be the many over the one, the collective over the individual, the form of life that is social. In this respect, the narrator is already moving towards an apprehension of how his mental torments might be overcome. The solution is, we might say, right in front of his eyes, although he remains blind to it, precisely because it is too close to be seen.

It is at this point that we can return to Wittgenstein. In his 1929 'Lecture on Ethics', Wittgenstein refers to 'the experience of feeling *absolutely* safe. [...] [T]he state of mind in which one is inclined to say "I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens."³² As he remarks: 'We all know what it means in ordinary life to be safe. I am safe in my room, when I cannot be run over by an omnibus. I am safe if I have had whooping cough and cannot therefore get it again. To be safe essentially means that it is physically impossible that certain things should happen to me and therefore it is nonsense to say that I am safe *whatever* happens. [...] [T]his is a misuse of the word "safe".'³³ Here I would suggest that the desire for *absolute safety* is ethically, as well as logically and linguistically, problematic: it is rooted in a refusal to acknowledge the world and our precarious existence within it. More specifically, it is based on a fantasy that things *must* be a certain way ('I must have silence in my passages,' as the narrator puts it). In both his early and later work, it is this 'must' that Wittgenstein invites us to recognize as the cause of our philosophical disquietude. In the *Tractatus* the temptation is to think that we *must* be able to formulate a once and for all theory of language, logic and the world; in the *Investigations* we find ourselves held captive by the belief 'that we *must* find [logically perfect] order, must find that ideal, in our actual language' (*PI*, §105). In both cases, what we do not do is to look and see how words actually – ordinarily – function; instead, we remain attached to a pseudo-scientific ideal. As Wittgenstein puts it in a remark which is strikingly applicable to the narrator's fetishistic attachment to an ideal burrow:

The ideal, as we think of it, is unshakeable. You can never get outside it; you must always turn back. There is no outside; outside you cannot breathe. – Where does this idea come from? It's like a pair of glasses on our nose through which we see everything we look at. It never occurs to us to take them off.

(*PI*, §103)

What binds the narrator to his anxious form of life is thus his attachment to the ideal of 'complete exactness' (*PI*, §91) (which equates

for him with *total security*), and the set of ‘riddling’ problems which this generates. These problems, however, have no objects, and hence can (in theory, at least) be eliminated *therapeutically*. Here the following sequence of remarks from the *Tractatus* can serve as our guide:

The riddle does not exist.

If a question can be put at all, then it *can* also be answered. [...]

[E]ven if *all possible* scientific questions can be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all. [...]

The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of this problem.

(Is not this the reason why men to whom after long doubting the sense of life became clear, could not then say wherein this sense consisted?)

(6.5/6.521)

To these remarks we can add the sentence that occurs at the end of *Tractatus* 6.43: ‘The world of the happy is quite another than that of the unhappy.’ The unhappy person – the anxious person – is, we might say, always asking the question ‘why?’ but in such a way that *no answer* could ever prove itself to be satisfactory. The happy person, by contrast, does not entangle him or herself in tortuous reflections (as though this equated with *real* thinking); rather, they frame their investigations in such a way that the questions they raise admit of answers. This is *no* positivism; nor is it to suggest that the happy consciousness does not from time to time succumb to intellectual restlessness, take flight from speaking *within* language games, or tantalize itself with nonsense. The point is that the happy person is better able to *recognize* these instances for what they are, to reflect upon them, and to integrate them into a process of working on oneself: ‘Don’t *for heaven’s sake*, be afraid of talking nonsense! Only don’t fail to pay attention to your nonsense.’³⁴

Whilst the happy and the unhappy world are emotionally opposed, they are at the same time dialectically related: knowledge of one implies knowledge of the other, and, in this respect, unhappiness already contains the logical possibility of its own negation. Moving from one state to the other does not therefore mean arriving somewhere new (the place we need to get to is the place that *we are already at*). Rather, it requires a transformation of outlook: one whereby the world is no longer seen as an obstacle and others are no longer perceived to be a threat. This, of course, can be immensely difficult: the unhappy are often wont to 'defend their misery against attempts at comfort or healing, as though it were a precious treasure. There is also happiness in unhappiness, a gain in foregoing pleasure, a satisfaction waiting in the darkest most passionate asceticism.'³⁵ Difficult does not, however, mean impossible; and the shift from unhappy to happy, or what Bloch terms anxiety to hope, remains open. As Bloch writes (in words which could have been composed for Kafka's narrator): 'Where are we going? What are we waiting for? What awaits us? Many only feel confused. The ground shakes, they do not know why and with what. There is a state of anxiety [...] [A] feeling that suits us better is overdue. It is a question of learning hope. Its work does not renounce, it is in love with success rather than failure.'³⁶ In 'The Burrow', the narrator's *true* success would be failure on his present terms: opening himself up to the great beast as the possibility of a future life with others. Hope begins where anxiety breaks off.

High to late modernism: The development of Wittgenstein's thought

Might we then, in a final twist, enlist Kafka to help us highlight some of the mistakes made by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*? In 'The Burrow', one of the errors which the narrator identifies is that of having constructed his underground labyrinth according to one single plan: all his energies have been expended building one central chamber rather

than considering the possibility of other rooms (330). Does the early Wittgenstein fall into a similar trap? Is the *Tractatus* likewise wrought with greatest care, but, in the end, structurally defective? The answer here, I claim, must be a simultaneous yes and no. By the lights of the later Wittgenstein, there are certainly problems with the early work. Regarding the issue of method, the *Tractatus* works (as previously outlined) by a process of seduction and shock, tempting the reader with nonsense disguised as sense, then, at the end of the book, exploding the reader's pseudo-philosophical perspective from inside: 'He who understands me finally recognizes [the book's propositions] as nonsense' (6.54). Rather than the strictly correct method (6.53), this is what we might call *the heroic method*: one which demands of the reader an arduous intellectual labour of climbing and discarding; a test of his or her ethico-philosophical authenticity, no less. In the *Investigations*, by contrast, Wittgenstein employs not a single philosophical method, but rather a series of different *methods* which work like 'different therapies' (*PI*, §133). Key to such methods is that they are demonstrated by 'means of examples', which serve to maintain a close relationship between author and reader/interlocutor. By the time of the later work, then, Wittgenstein has moved from an esoteric to an exoteric mode of dialectical authorship – one that is concerned not with bringing one to see the world aright, but merely with displaying 'a number of sketches of landscapes [...] made in the course of [...] long and involved journeyings' (*PI*, ix). This reorientation of methodological perspective is reflected in a number of criticisms which Wittgenstein makes of the *Tractatus*' style. In the context of a discussion with Friedrich Waismann (regarding a project of Waismann's entitled *Theses*),³⁷ Wittgenstein remarks: 'In my book I still proceeded dogmatically' and '[o]ne fault you can find with a dogmatic account is [...] that it is [...] arrogant.'³⁸ This literary dogmatism exists alongside what the *Investigations* appears to diagnose as a certain narrowness of social and linguistic vision in the *Tractatus*:

But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question, and command? — There are *countless* kinds: countless different

kinds of use of what we call “symbols,” “words,” “sentences”. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. [...] It is interesting to compare the multiplicity of the tools in language and of the ways they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language. (Including the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.)

(PI, §23)

Rather than thinking of these multiple discontinuities between the early and the later work in terms of a narrative of ‘assertion and negation, mistake and correction’,³⁹ we should, I would argue, think of the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* as presenting *two faces of modernism*. In a significant passage in the Preface to the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein says that having had occasion to re-read his early work it now appears to him that the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* could be published together in a single volume. He also says that ‘the latter could be seen in the right light only [...] against the background of my old way of thinking’ (PI, p. x). Setting the two works side by side in this manner serves to bring out their dialectical connection: both texts share an avowedly therapeutic aim, but under the pressure of different social, historical and intellectual forces they adopt different methods, forms and styles. The *Tractatus* reflects the very world from which it emerges: not only a world of trench-warfare (that is, of physical and mental endurance, of high anxiety, and climbing ladders as the ultimate act of heroism), but also a world in which the social status of art and philosophy has been rendered problematic (‘It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore’⁴⁰), thus forcing these mediums to turn back upon themselves. In an early twentieth century Europe defined by war and the expansion of the capitalist market, there is a sense in which the high modernist *Tractatus* criticizes society merely by existing: its sheer intellectual difficulty, its profound ethical commitment, and the minimalist beauty of its sentences, all placing it in diametric

opposition to a social order whose sole imperatives are utility and profit. The late modernist *Investigations*, by contrast, turns a more diplomatic face to the reader: cooperative rather than coercive, encouraging rather than testing. It too, however, is framed by its social and political contexts: the emergence of the Cold War, to be sure, but also the defeat of Nazism and the anticipation of a new era of social democratic welfare state politics. Like its forerunner, the *Investigations* is an ethical work:⁴¹ its intention is to bring its reader to a clearer picture of his or her philosophical torments. But the ethical now involves building up a rapport with the reader and providing a series of examples (sometimes commonplace, sometimes surreal) which are designed to lead words back 'home'.

There are, of course, dangers with both works, as well as intellectual blind spots. To the extent that they pitch themselves between the philosophical and the literary, the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* run the risk of generating as many problems as they solve. More specifically, by refraining not only from advancing philosophical doctrines but also from putting forward arguments of any kind, there is the perpetual possibility that, despite their therapeutic intent, both works will give rise to new (and perhaps even more severe) forms of philosophical perplexity and disquiet. Additionally, there is the issue that the works fail to offer any kind of historical explanations for the problems which they diagnose. Not only does this perpetuate the illusion that philosophical problems occur in the same way regardless of their social and historical contexts, it also shifts *sole responsibility* for solving these problems on to the reader, thus potentially distorting the therapeutic-transformative process which both works aim to set in motion. Finally, in a society such as our own where various late-capitalist dogmas have come to hold sway, one might argue that what is required (in certain instances) is a turning back towards, rather than away from, metaphysics: an ethico-political commitment to new theoretical conversations about the nature of truth and the meaning of the good life.

None of these are intended as definitive criticisms of either the early or later work. No author can cover him- or herself on *all* sides – not

even Wittgenstein. Exposure is perhaps the inevitable price one pays when one sets out not just to challenge philosophical orthodoxies, but to *revolutionize* the activity of philosophising itself – *twice*. The first stage of this revolution – the *Tractatus* – is born out of a period of crisis. For Wittgenstein, this crisis demands not simply new lines of thinking but also new ways of expressing thought: new approaches to form and style; a new method capable of dissolving old philosophical attachments. It is this revolutionary struggle that should continue to speak to us in our own moment of intellectual and political danger. By what means do we open up new conceptual horizons? What methods will enable us to puncture the illusions of thought generated by the prevailing (political and economic) ‘rationality’? How do we recover the possibility of seeing the world aright, where this simply means being able to imagine and to map a shared ethical life free from the terrors of capitalist exploitation and alienation? Applying ourselves collectively to these questions would indeed make us the true inheritors of modernism.

Notes

Preface

- 1 Wittgenstein's *Logische-Philosophische Abhandlung* first appeared in Wilhelm Ostwald's *Annalen der Naturphilosophie* in 1921; however, it is the text that appeared with Routledge & Kegan Paul a year later, in an English-German parallel edition translated by C. K. Ogden, which made Wittgenstein's philosophical name. The title for the English edition, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, was originally suggested by G. E. Moore.
- 2 Letter: Ludwig Wittgenstein to Bertrand Russell (March 13, 1919), in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Cambridge Letters, Correspondence With Russell, Keynes, Moore, Ramsey and Sraffa*, B. F. McGuinness and G. H. von Wright eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 111. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the notes as *CL* followed by a page reference. The letter is also cited in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge: Letters and Documents 1911–1951*, B. F. McGuinness ed. (Malden, MA. and Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 89.
- 3 Ray Monk, *The Duty of Genius* (London: Vintage, 1991), p. 183.
- 4 'Gottlob Frege, Letters to Ludwig Wittgenstein' (trans. Juliet Floyd & Burton Dreben) in *Interactive Wittgenstein: Essays in Memory of Georg Henrik von Wright*, Enzo De Pellegrin ed. (New York: Springer, 2011), p. 52.
- 5 Letter: Wittgenstein to Russell, May 6, 1920. Cited in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, 2nd edition, G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe eds., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), p. 132. Hereafter *NB* in the notes. Wittgenstein, of course, eventually swallowed his pride, and the work appeared with Russell Introduction.
- 6 Letter: Ludwig Wittgenstein to Ludwig von Ficker, cited by G. H. von Wright, "Historical Introduction: The Origin of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Prototractatus*, ed. B. F. McGuinness, T. Nyberg and G. H. von Wright, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 14, n. 2 (added emphasis). *Prototractatus* hereafter *PT* in the notes followed by a page number.

- 7 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, German text with an English translation *en regard* by C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 27. All subsequent reference to propositions in this book will appear in parenthesis in the body of the text using the propositional numbering system as it appears in the *Tractatus*. When referring to the author's Preface and to Bertrand Russell's 'Introduction', I will use *TLP* followed by a page number in the notes. Where other editions of the *Tractatus* are cited, an indication will be given in the notes.
- 8 *TLP*, p. 5 (added emphasis).
- 9 M. O'C. Drury, 'Conversations with Wittgenstein', in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), p. 173. (Wittgenstein is here concurring with remarks made by C. D. Broad.)
- 10 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, p. 1. Here I cite the Pears and McGuinness translation. (The original German quotation is given in *TLP*, p. 25.)
- 11 *PT*, p. 16.
- 12 *TLP*, p. 29.

Chapter 1

- 1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, G. H. von Wright, ed., revised edition of the text by Alois Pichler, Peter Winch, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 5. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the notes as *CV* followed by a page number.
- 2 Karl Kraus, *In These Great Times: A Karl Kraus Reader*, Harry Zohn, ed. (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1984), pp. 70–1.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Kraus's life-long struggle against the *empty phrase*, which for him symbolized the tyranny of journalists and the press, is insightfully captured by Walter Benjamin in his essay 'Karl Kraus', in Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, trans. (London and New York: Verso, 2006) pp. 258–90.

- 7 Hugo von Hofmannsthal, 'The Letter of Lord Chandos', in *Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Selected Prose*, Mary Hottinger and Tania and James Stern, trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1952), p. 134. Hofmannsthal's letter is presented as a letter written by an Elizabethan English nobleman – Philip, Lord Chandos, son of the Earl of Bath – to Francis Bacon. In the letter, Chandos apologizes to Bacon for his complete abandonment of literary activity.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 133, 134–5 & 138.
- 9 Letter: Antonin Artaud to Jacques Rivière (5 June 1923), in Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres Complètes*, I (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 24. Cited in translation in Raymond Williams, *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), p. 77.
- 10 T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems – 1909–1962* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), pp. 198 & 194.
- 11 Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Mary Caroline Richards, trans. (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 110.
- 12 See Matei Calinescu, *The Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), pp. 13–14. See also Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1988), pp. 208–9.
- 13 See Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London and New York: Verso, 1995), p. 9. Other surveys of the semantic history of modernity include Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Robert M. Wallace, trans. (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1983); Matei Calinescu, *The Five Faces of Modernity*; Hans Robert Jauss, 'Modernity and Literary Tradition', Christian Thorne, trans., *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 31, no. 2 (Winter 2005), pp. 329–64.
- 14 Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, p. 9.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 10. See also Matei Calinescu, *The Five Faces of Modernity*, pp. 19–22.
- 16 As Peter Osborne points out: it is during the sixteenth century 'that the phrase *neue Zeit* comes into use – although only in a neutral, chronological sense at first – signifying that the times are "new" by contrast with the Middle Ages'. See Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, p. 10.

- 17 'The Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns' or, as it became known in England following Swift's satire, 'The Battle of the Books.' These disputes have been documented in a number of comprehensive studies. See, for instance, Anne Elizabeth Burlingame's *The Battle of the Books in its Historical Setting* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1920); Richard Foster Jones, *Ancients and Moderns: A Study of the Background of the Battle of the Books* (St. Louis: Washington University Press, 1936); Joseph Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1991). Below, I follow Hans Robert Jauss, whose focus is on the *querelle* as it emerged in France.
- 18 See Matei Calinescu, *The Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 27.
- 19 Hans Robert Jauss, 'Modernity and Literary Tradition', pp. 343–4.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 344. As Jauss points out, Perrault uses the phrase: 'que c'est nous qui sommes les Anciens', see Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes en ce qui regarde les arts et les sciences* (Munich: Eidos, 1964), p. 113. A similar view to Perrault's had been advanced by a number of writers and philosophers during the early part of the seventeenth century, most notably Francis Bacon, who, in his book *The Advancement of Learning*, described the modern period, paradoxically, as the period of true antiquity: 'And to speak truly, Antiquitas saeculi juvenus mundi. These times are the ancient times, when the world is ancient, and not those which we account ancient ordine retrogrado, by a computation backward from ourselves.' Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, W. A. Wright, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), p. 38.
- 21 See Hans Robert Jauss, 'Modernity and Literary Tradition', p. 348.
- 22 Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity', Seyla Ben-Habib, trans., *New German Critique*, 22 (Winter 1981), pp. 3–14 (p. 4). (This paper has been reprinted under the title 'Modernity – An Incomplete Project', in *Postmodern Culture*, Hal Foster, ed. (London and Sydney: Pluto Press, 1989), pp. 3–15.)
- 23 Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity', p. 4.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *Selected Writings On Art and Artists*, P. E. Charvet, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 403–5.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 392.

- 28 Ibid., p. 403.
- 29 Ibid., pp. 405, 403 & 403–4.
- 30 Ibid., p. 405.
- 31 As Robert Pippin puts it: for Baudelaire ‘the poet or artist is obliged to find the “heroism” and beauty of modern life, to see it where it is not visible to the ordinary beholder’. See Robert B. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 33.
- 32 Paul de Man, ‘Literary History and Literary Modernity’, in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, revised 2nd edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 161.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid., p. 162.
- 36 Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2002). See, specifically, Jameson’s Preface (‘Regressions of the Current Age’), pp. 1–13.
- 37 Ibid., p. 8.
- 38 Oskar Lafontaine, *Das Herz schlägt Links* (Munich: Econ, 1999), cited in translation in Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 9.
- 39 Ibid., pp. 9–10.
- 40 T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 3.
- 41 Ibid., p. 1. Here it will be necessary to clarify what Clark means by his use of the term modernism, as his definition differs from the one which I put forward in later sections of this chapter. For Clark, modernism has a broad scope. According to his study, it begins on 25 Vendémiaire Year 2 (16 October 1793, as it became known), the day when Jacques-Louis David’s painting *Death of Marat* was released into the public realm. It continues through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, culminating, in the 1950s, with the painting of the abstract expressionists and the writings of Beckett. In his study, Clark uses the term modernism, loosely, to refer to ‘a family of modes’ of representation, and the ‘distinctive patterning of mental and technical possibilities’. These modes and patterns are illustrated, most clearly, in what Clark calls ‘limit cases’ – for example, Pissarro (in 1891), Malevich (in 1920) and Pollock (from 1947 to 1950), *ibid.*, p. 7.

42 Ibid., pp. 3 & 2.

43 Ibid., pp. 2–3.

44 Ibid., p. 7.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, pp. 12 & 215. For Jameson, substituting the term capitalism for the term modernity is intended to be a ‘therapeutic’, rather than a ‘dogmatic’, procedure – one which is ‘designed to exclude old problems (and to produce new and more interesting ones)’. However, what we *really* need, according to Jameson, ‘is a wholesale displacement of the thematics of modernity by the desire called Utopia’, *ibid.*, p. 215.

48 T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, p. 7.

49 Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 15.

50 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 223.

51 On the concept of family resemblance see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), §67 ff. All subsequent references to this work will appear in the body of the text as *PI* followed by a section number (§).

52 J. M. Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 3 & 7.

53 J. M. Bernstein, ‘Modernism as Aesthetics and Art History’, in James Elkin, ed., *Art History Versus Aesthetics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), p. 251.

54 Jürgen Habermas, ‘Modernity versus Postmodernity’, p. 8.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., p. 9.

59 Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, Thomas McCarthy, trans. (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 78.

60 Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Robert Hullot-Kentor, ed. and trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 1.

61 For two insightful, but very different, accounts of Kantian aesthetic judgements, see J. M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from*

- Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), especially ch. 1, pp. 17–65; and David Bell, ‘The Art of Judgement’, *Mind*, vol. 96, no. 382 (April 1987), pp. 221–44. For other (book length) accounts of Kant’s aesthetic theory, see Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Eva Schaper, *Studies in Kant’s Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979).
- 62 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, James Creed Meredith, trans. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 42 [§2]. For Kant, what this means is that aesthetic judgements are made without the mediation of concepts; that is, independently of any interests (moral, practical, sensible) that one may have in the object which is being judged. In aesthetic judgements, we are concerned not with ‘the real existence of the object’, but, rather, with its pure form or ‘representation’, *ibid.*, pp. 42–4.
- 63 *Ibid.*, pp. 50–1 [§6].
- 64 *Ibid.*, p. 41, fn 1 [§1]. Kant gives definitions of the beautiful at pp. 50, 60, 85 & 118. Kant contrasts the beautiful with the *agreeable* and the *good* (pp. 49 & 51–3), and, in Part I Book II, with the *sublime* (pp. 90 & 117).
- 65 *Ibid.*, p. 58. For Kant, the cognitive powers brought into play in judgements of taste are free because they are not determined by concepts (see note 63 above). This is what makes judgements of taste different from logical judgements: ‘The judgement of taste is differentiated from logical judgement by the fact that, whereas the latter subsumes a representation under a concept of the Object, the judgement of taste does not subsume under a concept at all [...] [T]he judgement of taste is not determinable by means of concepts’, *ibid.*, pp. 142–3 [§35].
- 66 *Ibid.*, p. 58 [§9].
- 67 Ernst Cassirer, *Kant’s Life and Thought*, James Haden, trans. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 318.
- 68 Robert L. Zimmerman, ‘Kant: The Aesthetic Judgement’, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 21, no. 3 (Spring 1963), pp. 333–44 (p. 337).
- 69 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Richard Nice, trans. (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 493.
- 70 *Ibid.*, p. 490.
- 71 *Ibid.*, p. 493.

- 72 Ibid., p. 492. The embedded quotation is taken from Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process, Vol. 1, The History of Manners* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), p. 9. For a bold defence of Kant's third *Critique*, see Michael Wayne, *Red Kant: Aesthetics, Marxism and the Third Critique* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).
- 73 Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', in *The Collected Essays and Criticism Vol. 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, John O'Brian, ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 85.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 For an interesting commentary on Greenberg's essay, see Stephen W. Melville, *Philosophy Beside Itself: On Deconstruction and Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), ch. 1.
- 76 See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Norman Kemp Smith, trans. (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). The fundamentals of Kant's first *Critique* are perspicuously set forth in his Preface to the first edition, pp. 7–15.
- 77 On this point, see also Clement Greenberg, 'Towards a Newer Laocoon', in *The Collected Essays and Criticism Vol. 1: Perceptions and Judgements, 1939–1944*, John O'Brian, ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 23–38.
- 78 Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', in *The Collected Essays and Criticism Vol. 4*, p. 87. As Greenberg states: 'Because flatness was the only condition painting shared with no other art, Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else', *ibid.*
- 79 Ibid., p. 86.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 Ibid., p. 93. As Greenberg also writes: 'I cannot insist enough that Modernism has never meant, and does not mean now, anything like a break with the artistic past [...] Modernist art continues the past without gap or break, and wherever it may end up it will never cease being intelligible in terms of the past', *ibid.*, p. 92.
- 82 T. J. Clark, 'Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 9, no. 1 (September 1982), pp. 139–56 (p. 152).
- 83 Ibid. Apropos Greenberg's argument that modernism involves *continuity* with the art of the past, it is also worth noting the following remark made by Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory*: 'nothing is more damaging to theoretical knowledge of modern art than its reduction to what it has in common

with older periods. What is specific to it slips through the methodological net of “nothing new under the sun”; it is reduced to the undialectical, gapless continuum of tranquil development that it in fact explodes.’

Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 19.

84 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 154.

85 Ibid., p. 153.

86 Ibid., p. 250.

87 Ibid., p. 1.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid., p. 227.

91 Jay Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies*, pp. 7–8 & 9.

92 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 225–6.

93 Ibid., p. 227.

94 Theodor Adorno, *Notes to Literature* vol. 2, Rolf Tiedmann, ed., Shierry Weber Nicholsen, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 93–4.

95 Ibid., p. 90, added emphasis. See also, Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 234: ‘For the sake of reconciliation, authentic works must blot out every trace of reconciliation in memory.’

96 Adorno, *Notes to Literature* vol. 2, p. 93.

97 Ibid., p. 90.

98 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 237.

99 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Michael Shaw, trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 22.

100 Ibid., p. 49.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid. (Added emphasis.)

103 Here we can contrast Bürger’s position with that of a traditional theorist of the avant-garde such as Renato Poggioli who conflates the strategic aims of modernism and avant-gardism. See Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1968).

104 Jochen Schulte-Sasse, ‘Foreword: Theory of Modernism versus Theory of the Avant-Garde’, in Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, p. xxxv.

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid., p. xxxvi.

- 107 See Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement* (London and New York: Verso, 1992), p. 36.
- 108 Raymond Williams, *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), p. 55.
- 109 Ibid., p. 62.
- 110 T. J. Clark, 'Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art', p. 147.
- 111 Clement Greenberg, 'Avant Garde and Kitsch', in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1965), p. 10.
- 112 Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 24.
- 113 Ibid.
- 114 Viktor Shklovsky, 'The Resurrection of the Word (1914)', in *Russian Formalism: A Collection of Articles and Texts in Translation*, Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlt, eds (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973), pp. 41–7.
- 115 Ibid., pp. 41 & 46.
- 116 Richard Sheppard, 'Modernism, Language, and Experimental Poetry: On Leaping Over Banisters and Learning How to Fly', *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 92, no. 1 (January 1997), pp. 98–123 (p. 99).
- 117 Here one can think, specifically, of Ezra Pound's appropriation of Roman lyric poetry and of the later T. S. Eliot's close proximity to Dante and the metaphysicals. See Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement*, p. 35.
- 118 Ibid.
- 119 For a detailed discussion of Mauthner's critique, see Gershon Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
- 120 The move to silence in modernist writing (and art) is explored by Susan Sontag in her essay 'The Aesthetics of Silence', in *Styles of Radical Will* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1969), pp. 3–34.
- 121 Terry Eagleton, *Wittgenstein: The Terry Eagleton Script, The Derek Jarman Film* (London: The British Film Institute, 1993), p. 5.
- 122 Quoted in Ray Monk, *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Vintage, 1991), pp. 43 & 57.
- 123 Rudolf Carnap, 'Intellectual Autobiography', in *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*, Paul A. Schilpp, ed. (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1963) pp. 25–6. (Added emphasis.)

Chapter 2

- 1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Letters to C. K. Ogden* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 46. (Hereafter *LO* in the notes followed by a page number.)
- 2 *PT*, p. 14, n. 2.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 See also *TLP*, p. 27.
- 7 See Frank P. Ramsey, 'General Propositions and Causality', in *The Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays*, R. B. Braithwaite, ed. (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 238.
- 8 See Frank P. Ramsey, 'Philosophy', in *The Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays*, p. 263. In the years immediately after the publication of the *Tractatus*, most commentators followed the critical lead given by Russell in his Introduction and by Ramsey in his review of the book for the journal *Mind*. See Frank P. Ramsey, 'Critical Notice of L. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*', *Mind*, vol. 32, no. 128 (1923), pp. 465–78. This 'logical atomist' reading of the book was eclipsed in the late 1920s and early 1930s by the readings of the Vienna Circle. See, for example, Moritz Schlick, 'The Turning Point in Philosophy' (1930), in *Logical Positivism*, A. J. Ayer, ed. New York and London: The Free Press, 1959), pp. 53–9; Otto Neurath, 'Sociology and Physicalism' (1931), in *Logical Positivism*, A. J. Ayer, ed., pp. 282–317; and Rudolf Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language*, Amethe Smeaton, trans. (London: Kegan Paul, 1937).
- 9 See, for example, G. E. M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's 'Tractatus'* (London: Hutchinson, 1963); Erik Stenius, *Wittgenstein's 'Tractatus': A Critical Exposition of its Main Lines of Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960); P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion: Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1997); Robert J. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987); Merrill B. Hintikka and Jaakko Hintikka, *Investigating Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); David Pears, *The False Prison: A Study of the Development of Wittgenstein's Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

- 10 G. E. M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's 'Tractatus'*, p. 162.
- 11 Ibid., pp. 163–73.
- 12 This is not to say, however, that such readings do not also admit of some important continuities between Wittgenstein's early and later views. See, for instance, Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's 'Tractatus'*, pp. 91–2.
- 13 Pears, *The False Prison* (vol. 1), p. 8.
- 14 See, for example, Michael Dummett, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), chapters 14 & 15.
- 15 P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, p. 146.
- 16 The characterization of the 'resolute' reading is introduced by Warren Goldfarb, 'Metaphysics and Nonsense: On Cora Diamond's *The Realistic Spirit*', *The Journal of Philosophical Research*, vol. 22 (1997), pp. 57–73 (p. 64), where it is attributed to an unpublished manuscript by Thomas Ricketts ('The Theory of Types and the Limits of Sense'). While there are a number of significant differences between the various anti-metaphysical/resolute interpretations of the *Tractatus*, major contributions to this reading have been made by the following authors in the following essays: Cora Diamond, 'Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the *Tractatus*', in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 179–204; James Conant, 'Must We Show What We Cannot Say?', in *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, R. Fleming and M. Payne, eds. (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1989), pp. 242–83; Juliet Floyd, 'The Uncaptive Eye: Solipsism in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in *Loneliness*, Boston University Studies in the Philosophy of Religion, 19, Leroy S. Rouner, ed. (Notre Dame, Indianapolis: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), pp. 79–108; Thomas Ricketts, 'Pictures, Logic, and the Limits of Sense in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, Hans Sluga and David Stern, eds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 59–99. I will explore a number of these readings along with more recent contributions later in this chapter.
- 17 The phrase is taken from Rush Rhees, *Discussions of Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 37.
- 18 James Conant and Cora Diamond, 'On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely: Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan', in *Wittgenstein's Lasting*

- Significance*, eds Max Kölbel and Bernhard Weiss (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 47.
- 19 Meredith Williams, 'Nonsense and Cosmic Exile: The Austere Reading of the *Tractatus*', in *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*, p. 6. (Added emphasis.) For Quine's original phrase, see W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), p. 275.
- 20 Ibid. Cora Diamond (and after her James Conant) refer to this (illusory) perspective as 'the view from sideways on'. See Cora Diamond, 'Throwing Away the Ladder', in *The Realistic Spirit*, p. 185. The phrase 'from sideways on' is borrowed from John McDowell. See John McDowell, 'Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following', in *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule*, Steven H. Holtzman and Christopher M. Leich, eds (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 141–62 (p. 150).
- 21 Alice Crary, 'Introduction', in Alice Crary and Rupert Read, eds, *The New Wittgenstein* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 1.
- 22 CV, p. 25. This approach to the *Tractatus* clearly follows Stanley Cavell's approach to *Philosophical Investigations*.
- 23 Oskari Kuusela, *The Struggle Against Dogmatism: Wittgenstein and the Concept of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 45.
- 24 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, 2nd edition, G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, eds, G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), p. 53 (entry for 1 June 1916). All subsequent references to this text will appear in the notes as NB followed by a page reference.
- 25 'Sachverhalt' is translated by C. K. Ogden as 'atomic fact', and by Pears and McGuinness as 'state of affairs'. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, David Pears and Brian McGuinness, trans. (London: Routledge, 2001). All subsequent references to propositions in this translation will appear in parenthesis in the body of the text, followed by an acknowledgement in the notes.
- 26 Norman Malcolm sheds some light on this issue in his memoir of Wittgenstein: 'I asked Wittgenstein whether, when he wrote the *Tractatus*, he had ever decided upon anything as an *example* of a "simple object". His reply was that at that time his thought had been that he was a *logician*; and that it was not his business, as a logician, to try to decide whether this thing or that was a simple thing or a complex thing, that being a purely

- empirical matter!’ See Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 70.
- 27 G. E. M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein’s ‘Tractatus’*, p. 19.
- 28 Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 73.
- 29 Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, p. 156.
- 30 In a footnote, Wittgenstein explains the explicit purpose of the decimal numbering system: ‘The decimal figures as numbers of the separate propositions indicate the logical importance of the propositions, the emphasis laid upon them in my exposition. The propositions *n.1*, *n.2*, *n.3*, etc., are comments on proposition No. *n*; the propositions *n.m1*, *n.m2*, etc., are comments on the proposition No. *n.m*; and so on.’ *TLP*, p. 31.
- 31 Letter: Ludwig Wittgenstein to Ludwig von Ficker, 6 December 1919, in *PT*, pp. 18–19.
- 32 Wittgenstein also uses the term ‘atomic proposition’. See ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’, in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*, J. C. Klagge and A. Nordmann, eds (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1993), pp. 29–35. All subsequent references to essays from this collection will appear in the notes as *PO* followed by a page number.
- 33 For an account of the development of truth-conditional semantics, see G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Language, Sense and Nonsense: A Critical Investigation into Modern Theories of Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), ch. 4.
- 34 See also Ludwig Wittgenstein, ‘Notes on Logic’ (1913), Appendix I in *NB*, p. 93.
- 35 For a clear summary of how Wittgenstein distinguishes between these two concepts, see Roger M. White, *Wittgenstein’s ‘Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus’* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 49–50. (White also highlights C. K. Ogden’s failure to consistently bring out the distinction between these two concepts in his translation of the *Tractatus*, see *ibid.*, p. 145.) To see how the distinction operates in the text, we can consider the following sentences from the Pears and McGuinness translation: ‘A picture can depict any reality whose form it has’ (2.171); ‘What a picture represents it represents independently of its truth or falsity’ (2.22).
- 36 Wittgenstein also explains pictures as models (2.12, 4.01). The notion of a model is adopted from the work of the physicist Heinrich Hertz. See

Heinrich Hertz, *The Principles of Mechanics*, D. E. Jones and J. T. Walley, trans. (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), especially pp. 1–45.

37 Added emphasis.

38 The origins of this idea can be traced back to a statement in the *Notebooks* (2 June 1915). Acknowledging that at the time his attempted theory does not express quite what he wants it to express, Wittgenstein remarks: 'For my theory does not really bring it out that the proposition *must* have two poles.' *NB*, p. 53.

39 In both translations of the *Tractatus*, the actual sentence here is: 'What *can* be shown *cannot* be said' (4.1212).

40 For a list of the numerous truths which, on the traditional account, cannot be stated but which are nevertheless shown in the *Tractatus*, see P. M. S. Hacker, 'Was He Trying to Whistle It?', in *The New Wittgenstein*, pp. 353–5.

41 Cora Diamond, 'Introduction', in *The Realistic Spirit*, p. 18.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 181.

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 181 & 194.

44 Clearly, non-resolute readers would want to dispute the accusation that they are 'chickening out' or acting in bad faith when they respond to 6.54. A trenchant critique of resolute readings is offered by Peter Sullivan in 'On Trying to Be Resolute: A Response to Kremer on the *Tractatus*', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 10:1 (2002), pp. 43–78. In the final paragraph of his essay, Sullivan writes: 'one effect I'd most like to think that this essay might have would be to temper the evangelical zeal with which resolute readers condemn [...] any work on the *Tractatus* which does not declare allegiance to their supposed new insight', *ibid.*, p. 72.

45 We might note here a resemblance between the 'resolute reading', as it is developed by Diamond, and the role of 'resoluteness' in Heidegger's early philosophy. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger promotes resoluteness as the touchstone of authentic existence – the means by which the individual seizes his or her own 'thrownness' and interprets it as an explicit choice. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 341–8 (§60).

46 Diamond refers to the Preface and the penultimate section (6.54) of the *Tractatus* as the 'frame of the book'. See Cora Diamond, 'Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in *The New*

Wittgenstein, pp. 149–73. However, the anti-metaphysical/resolute reading *can* also take its cue from remarks occurring in other parts of the *Tractatus*. According to Conant: ‘The distinction between what is part of the frame and what is part of the body of the work is not [. . .] simply a function of *where* in the work a remark occurs (say, near the beginning or the end of the book). Rather, it is a function of *how* it occurs.’ For Conant, the Preface, 3.32–3.326, 4–4.003, 4.111–4.112 and 6.53–6.54 all belong to the frame. See James Conant, ‘Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and Early Wittgenstein’, in *The New Wittgenstein*, p. 216, fn 102.

- 47 Cora Diamond, ‘Throwing Away the Ladder’, in *The Realistic Spirit*, p. 181.
- 48 Added emphasis.
- 49 See Cora Diamond, ‘Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*’, in *The New Wittgenstein*, p. 150.
- 50 James Conant, ‘Throwing Away the Top of the Ladder’, *The Yale Review* 79 (1991): pp. 328–64 (p. 344).
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Diamond’s discussion of the relation between Wittgenstein and Frege takes as its starting point the work of Peter Geach. See, specifically, P. T. Geach, ‘Saying and Showing in Frege and Wittgenstein’, in *Essays on Wittgenstein in Honor of G. H. von Wright*, J. Hintikka, ed., *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, 28 (1976), pp. 54–70.
- 53 See Gottlob Frege, ‘On Concept and Object’, in *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy*, B. F. McGuinness, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), pp. 182–94.
- 54 Ibid., p. 184.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Ibid., pp. 185–6.
- 57 Gottlob Frege, Preface to *Begriffsschrift, a formula language, modeled upon that of arithmetic, for pure thought*, in *From Frege to Gödel: A Source Book in Mathematical Logic, 1879–1931*, Jean van Heijenoort, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 6.
- 58 Ibid., p. 7.
- 59 Cora Diamond, ‘Throwing Away the Ladder’, in *The Realistic Spirit*, p. 183. Following Geach, Diamond discusses the distinction between functions and objects, but she uses this case to make a general point.

- 60 Matthew Ostrow, 'Wittgenstein and the Liberating Word', in *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy*, Erich H. Reck, ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 356.
- 61 Cora Diamond, 'Throwing Away the Ladder', in *The Realistic Spirit*, p. 183.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Indeed, as Wittgenstein writes: 'All propositions of our colloquial language are actually, just as they are, logically completely in order' (5.5563).
- 64 The distinction Wittgenstein wishes to draw between 'sign' and 'symbol' can be summarized as follows. The sign is an *orthographic unit* (the written marks on the page, for instance); the symbol is a *logical unit* (the sign together with its logico-syntactic application in language). See *TLP*, 3.32, 3.327.
- 65 See Cora Diamond, 'What Does a Concept Script Do?', in *The Realistic Spirit*, p. 117.
- 66 James Conant, 'Mild Mono-Wittgensteinianism', in Alice Crary, ed., *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Cora Diamond* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), pp. 31–142 (p. 80).
- 67 Cora Diamond, 'Throwing Away the Ladder', in *The Realistic Spirit*, p. 184. (Added emphasis.)
- 68 In the *Tractatus*, to recognize a particular 'philosophical proposition' as nonsensical is to recognize it as an elucidation. As Wittgenstein writes: 'My propositions are *elucidatory* in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as *nonsense*' (6.54). In a letter to C. K. Ogden, Wittgenstein makes this point even clearer: 'My propositions elucidate – whatever they do elucidate – in this way: [he who understands me finally recognizes them as *nonsense*].' See *LO*, p. 51.
- 69 Warren Goldfarb, 'Das Überwinden: Anti-Metaphysical Readings of the *Tractatus*' in *Beyond the 'Tractatus' Wars: The New Wittgenstein Debate*, Rupert Read and Matthew A. Lavery, eds (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 6–21 (p. 15).
- 70 The idea of 'Jacobin' and 'Girondist' readings have the following origin. At the Boston Colloquium for the Philosophy and History of Science (17 April 1997), Thomas Ricketts referred to Juliet Floyd's proposal for reading the *Tractatus* as 'Jacobin' – a term which Floyd accepted in partial homage to her late husband Burton Dreben. See Floyd, 'Wittgenstein and the Inexpressible', in *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life*, p. 219, fn 12. In his

- 1992 paper 'Putnam, Quine – and the Facts' (*Philosophical Topics*, vol. 20, no. 1, Spring 1992, pp. 293–315), Dreben writes: 'Quine, like Hume, is a truly radical philosopher. Putnam is not. He is the liberal – or at least the Girondist. Quine, he proclaims, goes "too far". Need reform, Yes! Revolution, No! [...] Putnam gives voice to the many who deem Quine Robespierre, the too disdainful discarder, the too ruthless repressor, of long cherished and (apparently) vital philosophical traditions' (p. 296).
- 71 Rupert Read and Rob Deans, 'The Possibility of a Resolutely Resolute Reading of the *Tractatus*', in Read and Lavery, eds, *Beyond the 'Tractatus' Wars*, pp. 149–70 (p. 149).
- 72 I should point out here that I am not assuming any similarity in points of detail between the readings of Wittgenstein put forward by Floyd and Read/Deans.
- 73 Juliet Floyd, 'Number and Ascriptions of Number in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in *Future Pasts: The Analytic Tradition in Twentieth-Century Philosophy*, Juliet Floyd and Sanford Shieh, eds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 179. See also Juliet Floyd, 'Wittgenstein and the Inexpressible', in *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life*, p. 196; Juliet Floyd, 'The Uncaptive Eye: Solipsism in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in *Loneliness*, pp. 85–6.
- 74 Read and Deans, 'The Possibility of a Resolutely Resolute Reading of the *Tractatus*' in Read and Lavery, eds, *Beyond the 'Tractatus' Wars*, pp. 153–4.
- 75 *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- 76 *Ibid.*, p. 165.
- 77 Juliet Floyd, 'Number and Ascriptions of Number in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in *Future Pasts*, p. 179.
- 78 That is, Floyd and Read/Deans explore the 'evolution' of Wittgenstein's thinking, but do not examine the host of political, social and cultural factors impacting upon the development of his writing. See Floyd, 'Wittgenstein and the Inexpressible' in *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life*, pp. 212–15; Read and Deans, 'The Possibility of a Resolutely Resolute Reading' in Read and Lavery, eds, *Beyond the 'Tractatus' Wars*, pp. 159–64.
- 79 Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 171.
- 80 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 305.

- 81 Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts Between the Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 11.
- 82 Rupert Read and Rob Deans, 'The Possibility of a Resolutely Resolute Reading of the *Tractatus*' in Read and Lavery, eds, *Beyond the 'Tractatus' Wars*, pp. 149 & 150.
- 83 Ibid., p. 170.
- 84 Ibid., p. 165.
- 85 Ibid., p. 170, fn 35.
- 86 Ibid., p. 166.
- 87 Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 57.
- 88 Stanley Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 195.
- 89 CV, p. 64.
- 90 P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, pp. 18–19.
- 91 Ibid., p. 19.
- 92 Ibid., pp. 18–26.
- 93 For an outline of the austere conception of nonsense, see Cora Diamond, 'Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*,' in *The New Wittgenstein*, pp. 153, 165; James Conant, 'The Method of the *Tractatus*,' in *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy*, E. H. Reck, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 380–1.
- 94 See TLP, 5.473 & 5.4733. The austere conception of nonsense (articulated at TLP, 5.473–5.4733) follows from Wittgenstein's reformulation of Frege's context principle at TLP, 3.3. (See also, TLP, 3.314.)
- 95 We can apply this to other sentences in the *Tractatus*. For example, section 2.02 states: 'The object is simple'. As it stands, this sentence is, by the lights of 5.4733, nonsense – it contains words to which no meaning has been given. However, had Wittgenstein stipulated that he was using 'object' to mean 'emerald' and 'simple' to mean 'green', then the sentence would not have been nonsense; rather, it would have been true. This example is given by A. W. Moore in 'Ineffability and Nonsense', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, sup. vol. 77 (2003), pp. 169–93.
- 96 The reader should already have noticed that there is something highly dubious about 6.53. As Michael Kremer points out: 'Like the positivist's

- verification theory of meaning, [6.53] appears to violate its own strictures. The “right method” we are told, would be to “say nothing except what can be said, therefore propositions of natural science, therefore something that has nothing to do with philosophy”. Yet this proclamation is not a proposition of natural science, nor does it have nothing to do with philosophy.’ It is clearly another rung of the ladder that we are being invited to discard. See Michael Kremer, ‘The Purpose of Tractarian Nonsense’, *Noûs* 35:1 (2001): pp. 39–73 (pp. 57–8).
- 97 Stanley Cavell, ‘The Wittgensteinian Event’, in *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 195. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 7 [A vii].
- 98 Rush Rhees, untitled contribution to *Philosophical Investigations* 24:2 (2001): pp. 153–62 (p. 155).
- 99 Stanley Cavell, ‘Declining Decline: Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture’, in *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures After Emerson After Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: Living Batch Press, 1989), p. 30.
- 100 NB, p. 40.
- 101 CV, p. 44.
- 102 Ibid., p. 89.
- 103 PI, §152.
- 104 Stanley Cavell, ‘The *Investigations*’ Everyday Aesthetics of Itself’, in *The Cavell Reader*, Stephen Mulhall, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 389.
- 105 Added emphasis.
- 106 Letter: Gottlob Frege to Ludwig Wittgenstein (28 June 1919), Gottlob Frege: Briefe an Ludwig Wittgenstein aus den Jahren 1914–1920, in *Wittgenstein in Focus – im Brennpunkt*, B. F. McGuinness and R. Haller, eds (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989). This letter is translated and cited by Juliet Floyd, ‘The Uncaptive Eye: Solipsism in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*’, in *Loneliness*, 89.
- 107 Letter: Gottlob Frege to Ludwig Wittgenstein (16 September 1919), in *Loneliness*, p. 91.
- 108 Juliet Floyd, ‘Wittgenstein and the Inexpressible’ in *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life*, p. 198.
- 109 Here I cite the Pears and McGuinness translation.

- 110 B. F. McGuinness, *Young Ludwig: Wittgenstein's Life, 1889–1921* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 301.
- 111 Ibid.
- 112 Eli Friedlander, *Signs of Sense: Reading Wittgenstein's 'Tractatus'* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 10.
- 113 On this connection, see also James Conant, 'Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense,' in *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer and Hilary Putnam, eds (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), pp. 195–224; Conant, 'Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors,' in *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, Timothy Tessin and Mario von der Ruhr, eds (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 248–331; M. Jamie Ferreira, 'The Point Outside the World: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Nonsense, Paradox and Religion,' *Religious Studies* 30 (1994): pp. 29–44.
- 114 Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, Walter Lowrie, trans. (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 24–5.
- 115 Ibid., pp. 39–40.
- 116 Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*,' in *PO*, p. 119.
- 117 Cora Diamond, 'Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*,' in *The New Wittgenstein*, esp. pp. 157–60.
- 118 Juliet Floyd, 'The Uncaptive Eye: Solipsism in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*,' in *Loneliness*, p. 87.
- 119 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (1998 edition), p. 25.
- 120 This image is used by Henry E. Allison in a comparison of Socrates and Kierkegaard. See Henry E. Allison, 'Christianity and Nonsense,' *Review of Metaphysics*, 20:3 (1967): pp. 432–60 (p. 460).
- 121 *PO*, p. 165.
- 122 Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,' in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 171.
- 123 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, trans. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), K1,1.
- 124 Ibid., K1,2.
- 125 Ibid., N4,4.
- 126 Ibid., N1,1.

- 127 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (1984 edition), p. 24. This is a different version of the translation to the one which appears in CV, p. 28: 'I believe I summed up where I stand in relation to philosophy when I said: really one should write philosophy only as one *writes a poem*.'
- 128 David Schalkwyk, 'Wittgenstein's "Imperfect Garden": The Ladders and Labyrinths of Philosophy as *Dichtung*', in John Gibson and Wolfgang Humer, eds, *The Literary Wittgenstein* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 56.
- 129 Plato, *The Republic*, 2nd edition, Desmond Lee, trans. (London: Penguin Books, 2003), Bks. II–III & X.
- 130 Ibid., pp. 339, 348, 340, 341.
- 131 Ibid., p. 349.
- 132 Stephen Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal: J M. Coetzee and the Difficulty of Reality in Literature and Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 2.
- 133 Ibid., p. 3.
- 134 Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening by Anti-Climacus*, Alastair Hannay, trans. (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 66.
- 135 Ibid.
- 136 Søren Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, Alexander Dru, ed. and trans. (London: Collins, 1958), p. 47.
- 137 Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to 'Philosophical Fragments'*, Howard and Edna Hong, ed. and trans. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 625 ff.
- 138 Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Howard and Edna Hong, ed. and trans. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 243.
- 139 Here I cite the Alastair Hannay translation. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 82.
- 140 Boris Groys, *Introduction to Antiphilosophy*, David Fernbach, trans. (London: Verso, 2012), p. viii.
- 141 Ibid., p. xiv.
- 142 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, R. J. Hollingdale, trans. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 74–5.
- 143 Friedrich Nietzsche, *A Nietzsche Reader* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 126.

- 144 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s*, Daniel Breazeale, ed. and trans. (New York: Prometheus, 1990), p. 56.
- 145 Ibid., p. 38.
- 146 Ibid., p. 19. This mode of poetic philosophizing is brought clearly into view in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Here Zarathustra, who describes himself as a 'poet', attempts, through a series of animated speeches, to get his listeners to 'create the future and to redeem by creating'. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, R. J. Hollingdale, trans. (London: Penguin, 1969), pp. 149 & 216. In the section of the text entitled 'Of Poets', Zarathustra does, however, make criticisms of 'the poets' which are strikingly similar to those advanced by Socrates in Book X of Plato's *Republic*.
- 147 Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth*, p. 17.
- 148 *PO*, p. 165.
- 149 Ibid.
- 150 Alain Badiou, *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy*, Bruno Bosteels, trans. (London: Verso, 2011), pp. 54 & 169.
- 151 *CV*, p. 61.
- 152 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, Cyril Barrett, ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), p. 28. Hereafter *LA* in the notes followed by a page number.
- 153 Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* (23 March 1938) item 120, p. 145r. This remark is translated by Wolfgang Heumer and cited by David Schalkwyk in his essay 'Wittgenstein's "Imperfect Garden": The Ladders and Labyrinths of Philosophy as *Dichtung*', in *The Literary Wittgenstein*, p. 73, fn 7.
- 154 Added emphasis.
- 155 Paul Engelmann, *Letters From Ludwig Wittgenstein, With a Memoir*, Brian McGuinness, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), p. 97.
- 156 Ibid., p. 98.
- 157 Prior to writing his Introduction, Russell wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrell (20 December 1919), describing his recent encounter with Wittgenstein: 'I had felt in his book a flavour of mysticism, but was astonished when I found he had become a complete mystic. He reads people like Kierkegaard and Angelus Silesius [...] He has penetrated deep into

- mystical ways of thought and feeling, but I think (though he wouldn't agree) that what he likes best in mysticism is its power to make him stop thinking.' Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Cambridge Letters: Correspondence with Russell, Keynes, Moore, Ramsey and Sraffa*, Brian McGuinness and Georg Henrik von Wright, eds (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 140. Hereafter CL in the notes followed by a page number.
- 158 Engelmann, *Letters From Ludwig Wittgenstein*, p. 31.
- 159 Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'A Lecture on Ethics' in *PO*, pp. 41–2.
- 160 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- 161 Piergiorgio Donatelli, 'The Problem of "The Higher" in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy*, D. Z. Phillips and Mario von der Ruhr, eds (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 11.
- 162 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 163 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 164 *PO*, p. 161. (A slightly different version of this quotation is cited in Donatelli.)
- 165 Piergiorgio Donatelli, 'The Problem of "The Higher" in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy*, p. 24.
- 166 *CV*, p. 16.
- 167 The most famous example of a positivist (emotivist) reformulation of the *Tractatus*' ethical remarks is that given by Rudolf Carnap in his essay 'The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language', in *Logical Positivism*, A. J. Ayer, ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1959), pp. 60–81.
- 168 Stephen Mulhall, 'Ethics in the Light of Wittgenstein', *Philosophical Papers* 31:3 (2002), pp. 293–321 (p. 304).
- 169 Ludwig Uhland, 'Graf Eberhards Weissdorn', cited in Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein, With a Memoir*, pp. 83–4.
- 170 Letter: Ludwig Wittgenstein to Paul Engelmann (9 April 1917), *ibid.*, p. 7.
- 171 See Michael Kremer, 'The Purpose of Tractarian Nonsense', pp. 62–4.
- 172 Cora Diamond, 'Introduction to "Having a Rough Story about what Moral Philosophy Is"', in *The Literary Wittgenstein*, John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer, eds (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 129.
- 173 Rush Rhees, 'The Philosophy of Wittgenstein', in *Discussions of Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 43.

174 Cf. *PI*, §464.

175 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, 3rd edition, G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees and G. E. M. Anscombe, eds, G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), p. 132. Further references to this work will appear in the notes as *RFM* followed by a page number.

Chapter 3

1 CV, p. 64.

2 Stanley Cavell, 'Declining Decline', Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture', in *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures After Emerson After Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: Living Batch Press, 1989), p. 59.

3 Ibid., p. 31.

4 Ibid., p. 60.

5 M. O'C. Drury, 'Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein', in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, Rush Rhees, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), p. 94.

6 CV, pp. 8–9. The 'Sketch' is a rough draft of the preface to the *Philosophical Remarks*. The final version appears as the Foreword in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*, Rush Rhees, ed., Raymond Hargreaves and Roger White, trans. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975).

7 CV, p. 8.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Here I cite the translation of this passage from CV (1984 edition), p. 6.

12 CV, p. 9.

13 Ibid.

14 CV, p. 9.

15 Francis Mulhern, *Culture/Metaculture* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 3–21.

16 Ibid., p. 19.

17 Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, an abridged version, Helmut Werner, ed., Charles Francis Atkinson, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 24.

- 18 Ibid., pp. 25–6.
- 19 Ibid., pp. 31 & 34.
- 20 Rush Rhees, ed., *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), p. 113.
- 21 Ibid., p. 112.
- 22 John King tellingly remarks that Wittgenstein ‘had no use for the philosophy in which [Spengler’s] ideas were wrapped’ (ibid., p. 73).
- 23 G. H. von Wright, ‘Wittgenstein in Relation to his Times’, in *Wittgenstein and his Times*, B. F. McGuinness, ed. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1998), p. 115.
- 24 CV, p. 48.
- 25 Ibid., p. 69.
- 26 CV, p. 64.
- 27 Kraus, *In These Great Times*, pp. 73–4. For more on the historical context of Kraus’s essay and its explicitly anti-war message, see Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus, Apocalyptic Satirist: Culture and Catastrophe in Habsburg Vienna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).
- 28 CV, p. 9. As the motto for *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein chose the following line from Nestroy’s play *The Protégé*: ‘Anyway, the thing about progress is that it looks much greater than it really is.’ This translation is proposed by David Stern in his paper ‘Nestroy, Augustine, and the Opening of the *Philosophical Investigations*’, in *Wittgenstein and the Future of Philosophy: A Reassessment after 50 Years: Proceedings of the 24th International Wittgenstein-Symposium*, Rudolf Haller and Klaus Puhl, eds (Vienna: öbv & hpt, 2002), p. 427.
- 29 Rudolf Carnap, ‘Intellectual Autobiography’, in *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*, p. 26.
- 30 Hans Sluga, ‘Ludwig Wittgenstein: Life and Work – An Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, Hans Sluga and David Stern, eds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 25.
- 31 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), p. 18. Further references to this work will be indicated as *BB* in the notes followed by a page number.
- 32 Wittgenstein’s critique of science is less a critique of science per se (he did, after all, begin his career as a mechanical engineer) and more of its place in culture and the spirit in which it is practiced. For

instance, in conversation with Drury, Wittgenstein makes the following remark about James Jeans's book *The Mysterious Universe*: 'These books which attempt to popularize science are an abomination. They pander to people's curiosity to be titillated by the wonders of science without having to do any of the really hard work involved in understanding what science is about.' See [M. O'C.] Drury, 'Conversations with Wittgenstein', in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, p. 132.

33 CV, p. 91.

34 Ibid., p. 42.

35 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth*, §56 (p. 21).

36 Ibid., §24 (p. 6).

37 Ibid., §73 (p. 29, fn 62).

38 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso 1997), pp. 3–43.

39 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 129.

40 Ibid., p. 72.

41 Ibid., p. 133.

42 Ibid., p. 230.

43 Ibid., p. 31.

44 Theodor Adorno, *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique*, Willis Domingo, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), p. 42.

45 Theodor Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, Shierry Weber Nicholsen, trans. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 101–2.

46 See also Chapter 4 of this book, p. 97, 'Limits, Adorno and the Kantian "block"'.

47 Letter: Ludwig Wittgenstein to Moritz Schlick (8 August 1932), originally cited in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Sein Leben in Bildern und Texten*, Nedo and Ranchetti, eds, p. 255. This letter is cited in English in Peter Winch's postscript to Norman Malcolm's *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 133, fn 9.

48 Theodor Adorno, 'Introduction', in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 5. Adorno's critique of Wittgenstein continues in this introduction.

49 Cf. *PI*, §1.

50 For Wittgenstein, scientific laws do not *explain* how the world is; rather, they simply provide a way of describing the world. See 6.341–6.372.

- 51 This remark originally appears, in a different context, in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, 2nd edition, G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, eds, G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), p. 51.
- 52 CV, p. 50. ‘Thoughts at peace. That is the goal someone who philosophizes longs for.’
- 53 Relevant here is the following remark from Wittgenstein’s early manuscripts: ‘In order to marvel human beings [...] have to wake up. Science is a way of sending them off to sleep.’ CV, p. 7.
- 54 On this point, see Eli Friedlander, *Signs of Sense*, pp. 22 & 155. Whilst Friedlander presents a persuasive argument for understanding the ladder in terms of a structure of return, I disagree with his contention that we are returned to the world, at the end of the *Tractatus*, ‘through an understanding of the limits of language’ (ibid., p. 22). The notion of ‘limits of language’ is, I would argue, part of what we are asked by the author to throw away at section 6.54.
- 55 M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1971), pp. 190–1. Describing this journey, Abrams writes: ‘the story is that of [a] painful pilgrimage through difficulties, sufferings and recurrent disasters in quest of a goal which, unwittingly, is the place [one] had left behind [...] and which, when reached, turns out to be even better than it had been at the beginning’, ibid., p. 191. For a full exploration of this idea, see chapters 3, 4 & 5 of Abrams’ text.
- 56 Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, pp. 197–252.
- 57 Ibid., p. 319.
- 58 T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), pp. 13 & 20. (In ‘East Coker’, the second quartet, the final sentence reiterates the first sentence, but with the elements reversed.)
- 59 Ibid., p. 43. These lines are from the final verse paragraph of part V of ‘Little Gidding’, the fourth quartet.
- 60 CV, p. 10.
- 61 Ibid., p. 9.
- 62 Ernest Gellner, *Words and Things: A Critical Account of Linguistic Philosophy and a Study in Ideology* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 296.
- 63 Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 179.

- 64 Ibid., pp. 179 & 182. The embedded quotation is taken from Wittgenstein and can be found in *PI*, §124.
- 65 Raymond Williams, 'Literature and Sociology: In Memory of Lucien Goldmann', *New Left Review* 67 (1971): pp. 3–18 (4).
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 I here cite the Pears and McGuinness translation, §5.5563 (cf. *PI*, §98). An alternative translation of this remark is given in the C. K. Ogden translation.
- 70 Williams, 'Literature and Sociology', p. 4.
- 71 J. C. Nyíri, 'Wittgenstein's Later Work in Relation to Conservatism', in *Wittgenstein and his Times*, B. F. McGuinness, ed. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1998), pp. 45, 48–9.
- 72 Ibid., pp. 48–51, 57.
- 73 Ibid., p. 56.
- 74 Ibid., p. 58.
- 75 Ibid., pp. 58–9.
- 76 Ibid., p. 59.
- 77 Ibid., p. 61.
- 78 See *PI*, §§199, 202, 206.
- 79 For Wittgenstein, the business of philosophy is description rather than explanation (*PI*, §109). However, in certain everyday circumstances – if, say, a particular rule was unclear to a person attempting to follow it – then there would be nothing to prevent one offering an explanation – for instance, by giving 'examples' (*PI*, §71). The claim that rules *cannot* be justified – which opens Wittgenstein up to the charge of moral relativism – misses the significance of *PI*, §289: 'To use a word without a justification does not mean to use it without right.'
- 80 Nyíri, 'Wittgenstein's Later Work in Relation to Conservatism', p. 58.
- 81 Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 52.
- 82 There is, of course, much more that can be said about Wittgenstein's complex treatment of rules in his later writings. However, Cavell's crucial point is that for Wittgenstein we do not need a substantive philosophical account of rule-following in order to be able to *go on*. This is fully in line with Wittgenstein's anti-metaphysical, therapeutic conception of

philosophy outlined at *PI*, §§89–133. Here it is also worth noting Wittgenstein's remark in the *Blue Book*: 'For remember that in general we don't use language according to strict rules – it hasn't been taught us by strict rules either,' See *BB*, p. 25.

83 Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, p. 52.

84 Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 32. For Cavell, we appeal to criteria only when 'attunement is threatened or lost. [...] Then we start finding ourselves by finding out and declaring the criteria upon which we are in agreement' (p. 34). Agreement itself, however, cannot be abstracted 'from the life into which it is woven.' On this point, see Cora Diamond, 'Rules: Looking in the Right Place', in *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars*, D. Z. Phillips and Peter Winch, eds (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 12–34.

85 Terry Eagleton, 'Wittgenstein's Friends', *New Left Review* 135 (September–October 1982), pp. 64–90 (p. 71).

86 Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, p. 175.

87 Cora Diamond, 'Criss-Cross Philosophy', in *Wittgenstein at Work: Method in the 'Philosophical Investigations'*, Erich Ammereller and Eugen Fischer, eds (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 215.

88 *RFM*, p. 132. This remark appears in the context of a discussion of Cantor's Diagonal Argument, demonstrating the important connection in Wittgenstein's thinking between, on the one hand, questions of philosophy, logic and mathematics, and, on the other, questions of ethics, subjectivity and culture.

89 Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', in *The German Ideology*, 2nd edition (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1974), p. 123.

90 *Ibid.*, pp. 103 & 118.

91 *BB*, p. 28.

92 In the preface to the *Investigations* Wittgenstein writes that he is 'indebted to [Sraffa's] stimulus for the most consequential ideas of this book', *PI*, p. x. For a broad ranging discussion on Wittgenstein, Marx and Marxism, see the essays contained in Gavin Kitching and Nigel Pleasants, eds, *Marx and Wittgenstein: Knowledge, Morality and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2002).

93 *CV*, p. 70. (Added emphasis.) Rush Rhees also recalls that '[l]ong before the *Investigations* [Wittgenstein] was telling his students: "What I should like

- to get at is for you not to agree with me in particular opinions but to investigate the matter in the right way [...] I don't want to give you a definition of philosophy, but I should like you to have a very lively idea as to the characters of philosophical problems. If you had, by the way, I could stop lecturing at once [...] What I want to teach you isn't opinions but a method." See Rush Rhees, *Discussions of Wittgenstein*, pp. 42–3.
- 94 See Fania Pascal, 'Wittgenstein: A Personal Memoir', in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, especially pp. 35–6.
- 95 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, eds, G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), §455 [p. 81]. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the notes as Z followed by a page reference.
- 96 Rush Rhees, 'Postscript', in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, pp. 229–30.
- 97 CV, p. 24.
- 98 Karl Marx, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction', in *Early Political Writings*, Joseph O'Malley, ed. and trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 70.
- 99 Ibid., p. 69.
- 100 Karl Marx, Preface to *The German Ideology*, p. 37.
- 101 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations recorded by F. Waismann*, B. F. McGuinness, ed., J. Schulte and B. F. McGuinness, trans. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), pp. 116–17. Hereafter VC followed by a page number in the notes.
- 102 Added emphasis.
- 103 CV (1984 edition), p. 60.

Chapter 4

- 1 CV, p. 22.
- 2 P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, p. 23.
- 3 Ibid., p. 86. In Wittgenstein's writings, the idea of the 'metaphysical subject' can be traced back to a number of remarks in the *Notebooks 1914–1916*. See especially NB, pp. 80 & 82. These remarks reappear in the *Tractatus*. See TLP, 5.633 & 5.641. I look in more detail at the idea of the metaphysical subject in the section below entitled 'Overcoming Solipsism'.

- 4 P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, p. 86.
- 5 Ibid., p. 100.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid., p. 102.
- 8 Juliet Floyd, 'The Uncaptive Eye: Solipsism in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in *Loneliness*, p. 80.
- 9 James Conant, 'Must We Show What We Cannot Say?', in *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, p. 254.
- 10 Ibid. See also James Conant, 'The Method of the *Tractatus*', in *From Frege to Wittgenstein*, especially pp. 422–4.
- 11 Rupert Read and Robert Deans, '"Nothing is Shown": A "Resolute" Response to Mounce, Emiliani, Koethe and Vilhauer', *Philosophical Investigations*, 26:3 (July 2003), pp. 239–67 (p. 244). (Added emphasis.)
- 12 Added emphasis.
- 13 See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction, p. 48 (A 7/B 11). For Kant, analytic judgements are 'explicative': they add 'nothing through the predicate to the concept of the subject, but merely [break] it up into those constituent concepts that have all along been thought in it, although confusedly'. Synthetic judgements, on the other hand, are 'ampliative': they 'add to the concept of the subject a predicate which has not been in any wise thought in it, and which no analysis could possibly extract from it', *ibid.* Such judgements depend upon the alignment of two elements: pure a priori intuitions and pure a priori concepts, *ibid.*, pp. 90–1 (B 73).
- 14 Ibid., p. 370 (B 410). See also p. 194 (A 158 /B 197).
- 15 Ibid., p. 7 (A vii). See also p. 266 ff (A 249–50/B 306–7).
- 16 Theodor Adorno, *Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason'*, Rolf Tiedemann, ed., Rodney Livingstone, trans. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001). See, specifically, Lecture 16 Society/'Block', pp. 170–9.
- 17 Ibid., p. 174.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid., p. 176. This relation is also explored by Georg Lukács in 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, Rodney Livingstone, trans. (London: Merlin Press, 1971), pp. 83–222.

- 21 Adorno, *Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason'*, p. 176.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid. Adorno speaks approvingly of this idea in contrast to positivism, which, he argues, is incapable of such a memory and only 'hold[s] fast to what is given [...] while dismissing everything over and above that as mere phantoms', *ibid.*, p. 177.
- 26 Ibid., p. 177.
- 27 Ibid., p. 178.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 See Theodor Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics: Fragments of a Lecture Course 1965/1966* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p. 74.
- 30 Adorno, *Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason'*, p. 268, fn 12.
- 31 Ironically, in a remark in his manuscripts, Wittgenstein describes his philosophy as a form of stammering: 'My writing is often nothing but "stammering"; CV, p. 16. This passage would, I presume, have been unknown to Adorno.
- 32 This distinction follows from the fact that Adorno (incorrectly) assimilates Wittgenstein's views with those of the logical positivists. For more on this assimilation see ch. 3 of this book.
- 33 Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, pp. 185–6. See also Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, E. B. Ashton, trans. (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 9.
- 34 P. M. S. Hacker, 'Wittgenstein and the Autonomy of Humanistic Understanding', in *Wittgenstein, Theory and the Arts*, Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey, eds (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 39.
- 35 Theodor Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 101.
- 36 Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973), p. 117.
- 37 Ibid., pp. 112–17. See also my remarks on Hofmannsthal's 'Lord Chandos' letter in the section entitled 'Language, Culture and Crisis' in ch. 1 of this book.
- 38 Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, p. 118.
- 39 Ibid., p. 119.
- 40 As Janik and Toulmin point out, Ludwig Boltzmann and Heinrich Hertz were the two scientific thinkers whose work had the most significant

impact upon Wittgenstein's intellectual development. See also Allan Janik, *Wittgenstein's Vienna Revisited* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2001), pp. 147–70.

41 Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, p. 197.

42 Saussure's dissatisfaction with the older linguistics was essentially a methodological-terminological one. In a letter to Antoine Meillet, Saussure expresses this dissatisfaction as follows:

The utter ineptness of current terminology, the need for reform, and to show what kind of an object language is in general – these things over and over again spoil whatever pleasure I can take in historical studies, even though I have no greater wish than not to have to bother myself with these general linguistic considerations [...] Much against my own inclination all this will end up with a book in which I will explain without any passion or enthusiasm how there is not a single term used in linguistics today which has any meaning for me whatsoever. And only after that, I'm afraid, will I be able to take up my work again where I left it.

Cited in translation in Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 13. Significant parallels can be drawn between Saussure's attempts to overcome traditional linguistics and Wittgenstein's attempts to overcome 'the old logic' of Frege and Russell.

43 Ibid., p. 12.

44 Ibid., p. 13.

45 Ibid., p. 12.

46 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, A. V. Miller, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §165 (p. 102).

47 Ibid., §165 (p. 103).

48 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., Alan Sheridan, trans. (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 103.

49 CV (1984 edition), p. 15.

50 Philip Shields, *Logic and Sin in the Writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 10.

51 David G. Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1995), p. 70.

52 Added emphasis.

- 53 *PO*, p. 187.
- 54 *PT*, p. 16.
- 55 Again I borrow the phrase from John McDowell. See John McDowell, 'Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following', in *Wittgenstein: to Follow a Rule*, p. 150.
- 56 James Conant, 'The Method of the *Tractatus*', in *From Frege to Wittgenstein*, pp. 423–4.
- 57 Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, p. 57.
- 58 *PO*, p. 195.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- 60 *VC*, pp. 68–9.
- 61 As Diamond argues, when uttering ethical sentences, one way of making clear that we are not 'under the illusion that we are talking sense' would be by 'framing our sentences; for example, someone might say: "I am inclined to say "The goodness of life does not depend on things going this way or that" ". Words like "This is what I am inclined to say", used to frame such sentences, may thus mark both that they are recognized by the utterer as nonsense, and that that recognition does not involve their losing their attractiveness.' See Cora Diamond, 'Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in *The New Wittgenstein*, p. 161.
- 62 See Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 78.
- 63 This might be described in Cavellian parlance as a 'perfectionist' struggle. Cavell's thoughts on moral perfectionism are given their first and most sustained articulation in his 1988 Carus Lectures. See Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990). On the relation between Cavell's perfectionism and modernist literature, specifically Beckett's *Endgame*, see Ben Ware, 'Tragic-Dialectical-Perfectionism: On the Ethics of Beckett's *Endgame*', *College Literature* (2015), vol. 42, no. 1, pp. 3–22.
- 64 According to the instructions given at the beginning of the *Tractatus* (*TLP*, p. 31), 5.62 comments on 5.6, not 5.61. Further evidence of this can also be found in earlier versions of these remarks in the *Notebooks 1914–1916* (see *NB*, p. 49) and in the *Prototractatus* (see *PT*, p. 185). The table provided by Peter Sullivan in his essay 'The "Truth" in Solipsism, and Wittgenstein's

- Rejection of the A Priori', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 4:2 (1996), pp. 195–219 [p. 201], helpfully demonstrates the correspondences between the *Tractatus* 5.6s and the equivalent remarks in the *Notebooks* and the *Prototractatus*.
- 65 See, for example, David Bell, 'Solipsism and Subjectivity', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 4:2 (1996), pp. 155–74; M. U. Coyne, 'Eye, "I" and Mine: The Self of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 20 (1982), pp. 313–23; Cora Diamond, 'Does Bismarck Have a Beetle in his Box?', in *The New Wittgenstein*, pp. 262–92; Juliet Floyd, 'The Uncaptive Eye: Solipsism in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in *Loneliness*, pp. 79–108; P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, ch. IV; Michael Kremer, 'To What Extent is Solipsism a Truth?', in Barry Stocker ed., *Post-Analytic 'Tractatus'* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 59–84; H. O. Mounce, 'Philosophy, Solipsism and Thought', *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 186 (1997), pp. 1–18; David Pears, *The False Prison*, vol. 1, ch. VII; David Pears, 'The Originality of Wittgenstein's Investigation of Solipsism', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 4:2 (1996), pp. 124–36; Peter Sullivan, 'The "Truth" in Solipsism, and Wittgenstein's Rejection of the A Priori'; Bernard Williams, 'Wittgenstein and Idealism', in *Wittgenstein's Copernican Revolution: The Question of Linguistic Idealism*, ed. Ilham Dilman (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 83–95.
- 66 See David Bell, 'Solipsism and Subjectivity', p. 158.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Bertrand Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1927), p. 302. This passage is cited in David Bell, 'Solipsism and Subjectivity', p. 158.
- 69 The implication here is that strict solipsism would be a form of mental illness. For a sensitive and highly original exploration of this connection, see Louis Sass, *The Paradoxes of Delusion: Wittgenstein, Schreber, and the Schizophrenic Mind* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).
- 70 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, E. F. J. Payne, trans. (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), §19, p. 104. The term which Schopenhauer uses for solipsism is 'theoretical egoism'.
- 71 David Pears, 'The Originality of Wittgenstein's Investigation of Solipsism', p. 124.
- 72 NB, p. 49.

73 Ibid., p. 80.

74 NB, p. 82. P. M. S. Hacker provides full coverage of the remarks on solipsism in the *Notebooks* in P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, pp. 81–104.

75 Cf. NB, p. 77.

76 Cf. NB, p. 84.

77 P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, pp. 99–100.

78 There is another argument against the traditional-ineffability reading of showing that it seems apt to draw attention to here. In a letter to Bertrand Russell, written (19 August 1919) approximately one year after he had completed work on the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein explains to Russell the larger point of the book:

I'm afraid you haven't really got hold of my main contention, to which the whole business of logical prop[osition]s is only a corollary. The main point is the theory of what can be expressed (gesagt) by prop[osition]s – i.e. by language – (and, which comes to the same, what can be *thought*) and what can not be expressed by prop[osition]s, but only shown (gezeigt); which, I believe, is the cardinal problem of philosophy. (CL, p. 124.)

Numerous traditional interpreters have read this letter as providing incontrovertible evidence that the *Tractatus*' main point is to provide an ineffable 'theory' of 'showing'. P. M. S. Hacker argues that the letter presents a clear case against resolute readings of the text. As he puts it: '[i]t is implausible to suppose that [Wittgenstein] was pulling Russell's leg, and that the *real* point of the book is that there is nothing at all to be shown'. (See P. M. S. Hacker, 'Was He Trying to Whistle It?', in Crary and Read eds, *The New Wittgenstein*, p. 373.) However, if we examine the letter more closely, it would appear that things are much less straightforward than they might at first appear. First, Wittgenstein speaks of the book's 'main contention' as 'the theory of what can be expressed by propositions' and what can only be 'shown'. However, knowing what we know about the *Tractatus*' conception of philosophy – i.e. that 'philosophy is not a theory but an activity' (4.112) – it seems difficult to take this statement as expressing any kind of doctrinal view on Wittgenstein's part. Wittgenstein then goes on to say that the theory of what can be expressed by language and what can only be shown is 'the cardinal problem of philosophy'. In the Preface to the *Tractatus*,

Wittgenstein states that ‘the book deals with the problems of philosophy’ by showing ‘that the method of formulating these problems rests on the misunderstanding of the logic of our language’ (*TLP*, p. 27). By making his claim to Russell about ‘the theory’ of what can be said and what can only be shown, Wittgenstein can thus be seen to signal that he takes this ‘theory’ to represent a ‘problem of philosophy’, and that this problem – as cardinal – is one that the *Tractatus* aims to solve (*TLP*, p. 29). This argument has been advanced by Michael Kremer in his paper ‘The Purpose of Tractarian Nonsense’, p. 64. Peter Sullivan dismisses Kremer’s argument in ‘On Trying to be Resolute: A Response to Kremer on the *Tractatus*’, p. 74, fn 15. Kremer provides a more fully worked out (and, I would argue, convincing) defence of his position in his essay ‘The Cardinal Problem of Philosophy’, in Alice Crary, ed., *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Cora Diamond* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 143–76.

79 Here I adapt a phrase from David Pears, ‘The Originality of Wittgenstein’s Investigation of Solipsism’, p. 125.

80 Sullivan, ‘The “Truth” in Solipsism, and Wittgenstein’s Rejection of the A Priori’, p. 196.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid., p. 198.

83 Michael Kremer, ‘To What Extent is Solipsism a Truth?’, in *Post-Analytic Tractatus*, p. 71.

84 Quentin Meillassoux *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, Ray Brassier, trans. (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 5.

85 Ibid., p. 28.

86 Ibid., p. 10. Closely related to ancestral statements is what Meillassoux calls ‘arche-fossil’ or ‘fossil-matter’: materials indicating the existence of ancestral life or events anterior to thought (p. 10).

87 Ibid., p. 21.

88 Cora Diamond, ‘The *Tractatus* and the Limits of Sense’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*, Oskari Kuusela and Marie McGinn eds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 271 & 268. Cf. *TLP*, 3.343.

89 Ibid., p. 269.

90 Ibid., p. 271.

91 Juliet Floyd, ‘The Uncaptive Eye: Solipsism in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*’, in *Loneliness*, p. 103. (Added emphasis.)

- 92 Ibid., p. 79.
- 93 Ray Monk, *The Duty of Genius*, p. 107.
- 94 From David Pinsent's diary, 1 June 1912, cited in B. F. McGuinness, *Young Ludwig*, p. 93.
- 95 From David Pinsent's diary, 24 September 1913, cited in B. F. McGuinness, *Young Ludwig*, p. 184.
- 96 Paul Engelmann, *Letters From Ludwig Wittgenstein, With a Memoir*, p. 33. See also, Wittgenstein's letters to Engelmann dated 16 November 1919; 26 January 1920; 21 June 1920, *ibid.*, pp. 21, 27 & 33.
- 97 *NB*, p. 91. For Wittgenstein, however, the idea of suicide was itself morally repugnant: 'If suicide is allowed then everything is allowed. If anything is not allowed then suicide is not allowed. This throws light on the nature of ethics, for suicide is, so to speak, the elementary sin', *ibid.* For Wittgenstein, suicide is *the* elementary sin because it involves an extreme exertion of the will (the will to *leave life*) and, therefore, a refusal to accept the powerlessness that belongs to life, *ibid.*, p. 73. To commit suicide is to draw limits to life by treating life as conditional on things going a certain way. Understood in this way, suicide can thus be seen as the very antithesis of Wittgenstein's idea of 'renouncing any influence on happenings' in the world, *ibid.*
- 98 See Louis Sass, 'Deep Disquietudes: Reflections on Wittgenstein as Antiphilosopher', in *Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy* James C. Klagge, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 98–155.
- 99 *Ibid.*, pp. 449–75, p. 101ff. As Sass points out: 'the term "schizoid" ["schizothymic" is the older term, used to refer to a less severe variant] is easily misunderstood. We need, first, to distinguish it sharply from "schizophrenic." "Schizoid" does not imply a psychotic condition but, rather, a general style of character or personality that may be found to any degree and can be present in well-functioning and reasonably healthy persons', *ibid.* In exploring the 'schizoid' aspects of Wittgenstein's outlook, Sass is thus trying to capture *qualitative characteristics*, not gauge degrees of pathology or health.
- 100 *Ibid.*, p. 107.
- 101 *Ibid.*, pp. 107–8.
- 102 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

- 103 NB, p. 81.
- 104 Ibid., p. 82.
- 105 Ibid., p. 73.
- 106 Ray Monk, *The Duty of Genius*, p. 116. Cited in Louis Sass, 'Deep Disquietudes: Reflections on Wittgenstein as Antiphilosopher', in *Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy*, p. 113.
- 107 See PO, pp. 41–2. Apropos the attempt to *express* these ideas of 'absolute' or 'ethical' value, Wittgenstein remarks: 'the first thing I have to say is, that the verbal expression which we give to these experiences is nonsense!'; *ibid.*, p. 41.
- 108 See Louis Sass, *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), ch. 3 ('The Separated Self').
- 109 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Boston: St Martin's Press, 1993), p. 213. This passage is cited by Louis Sass in *Madness and Modernism*, p. 82.
- 110 Franz Kafka, 'Investigations of a Dog', in *Franz Kafka: The Complete Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 278. This passage is cited by Louis Sass in *Madness and Modernism*, p. 83.
- 111 Louis Sass, 'Deep Disquietudes: Reflections on Wittgenstein as Antiphilosopher', in *Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy*, p. 104.
- 112 Ibid., pp. 118 & 102.
- 113 See Louis Sass, 'Deep Disquietudes: Reflections on Wittgenstein as Antiphilosopher', in *Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy*, p. 137.
- 114 Ibid., p. 138.
- 115 Ibid., p. 137.
- 116 Ibid.
- 117 See Ernest Gellner, *Language and Solitude: Wittgenstein, Malinowski and the Habsburg Dilemma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 46 & 65. Gellner's text bristles with undisguised hostility to Wittgenstein's work. He goes on to refer to the *Tractatus* as 'a squeal of pessimistic woe, an expression of despair', *ibid.*, p. 59.
- 118 The project of linguistic emancipation is undertaken most radically by the various avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. For André Breton and the French surrealists, the creative potential of words can be unlocked through the practice of 'psychic automatism'

- (‘automatic writing’). Breton defines this practice in surrealism’s first manifesto: ‘Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.’ See André Breton, ‘Manifesto of Surrealism’ (1924), in André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, trans. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), p. 26. The Italian futurists (led by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti) also emphasize the need to ‘liberate words’. The blueprint for futurist ‘parole in libertà’ is put forward in the movement’s two linguistic manifestos: ‘Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature’ (1912), in F. T. Marinetti, *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, R. Flint, trans. (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), pp. 84–9; and ‘Destruction of Syntax – Imagination without Strings – Words-in-Freedom’ (1913), in Umbro Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, R. Flint, trans. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), pp. 95–106.
- 119 During the early part of the twentieth century, linguistic clarification was a cultural as well as an aesthetic concern. For instance, in the early 1920s, the project of ‘Basic English’ was developed under the auspices of C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards. This project was closely connected to the more general philosophical concerns of Ogden and Richards which were put forward in *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language Upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1923).
- 120 The image of purification is used by Mallarmé in the sonnet ‘Le Tombeau d’Edgar Poe’: ‘With a hydra-spasm, once hearing the angel endow/with a sense more pure the words of the tribe.’ See Stéphane Mallarmé, *Selected Poems*, C. F. MacIntyre, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 89. Mallarmé’s project of poetic purification is invoked (though not endorsed) by T. S. Eliot in *Four Quartets* (‘Little Gidding’): ‘our concern was speech, and speech impelled us/To purify the dialect of the tribe.’ See T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, p. 39.
- 121 See Hugo von Hofmannsthal, ‘The Letter of Lord Chandos’ in *Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Selected Prose*, pp. 129–41. See also T. S. Eliot’s famous remark: ‘It’s strange that words are so inadequate.’ T. S. Eliot, *The Elder Statesman* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), Act III (p. 70).

- 122 For a general discussion of this point, see Susan Sontag, 'The Aesthetics of Silence', in *Styles of Radical Will*, pp. 3–34; George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 161–205.
- 123 André Breton, 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism' (1930), in André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 152.
- 124 See Richard Kuhns, *Literature and Philosophy: Structures of Experience* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 257.
- 125 See Roger Foster, *Adorno: The Recovery of Experience* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007), p. 41.
- 126 Ezra Pound, 'Vorticism,' *Fortnightly Review*, 96 (1 September 1914), pp. 461–71. <http://fortnightlyreview.co.uk/vorticism/> [accessed 8 April 2015].
- 127 CV, p. 13.
- 128 See James Conant, 'Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and Early Wittgenstein', in *The New Wittgenstein*, p. 177.
- 129 See Richard Eldridge, *Leading a Human Life: Wittgenstein, Intentionality and Romanticism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997), p. 191. Eldridge's study looks specifically at *Philosophical Investigations*; however, his discussion is highly relevant to the *Tractatus* also.
- 130 For Stanley Cavell, 'inexpressiveness' is *both* fear and fantasy. In *The Claim of Reason*, in the context of a reading of the sections on private language in the *Investigations*, Cavell writes: 'So the fantasy of a private language, underlying the wish to deny the publicness of language, turns out, so far, to be a fantasy, or fear [...] of inexpressiveness, one in which I am not merely unknown, but in which I am powerless to make myself known.' See Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, p. 351.
- 131 We can think of this aspiration in terms of the desire for an *ideal language* – whether artistic or philosophical.
- 132 *Mallarmé: Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters*, Bradford Cook, trans. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1956), p. 38. In his essay 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', Walter Benjamin uses the mythology of the Fall to depict the transformation of language from a 'medium' of spiritual communication to a (mere) 'means' of practical communication. See Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Vol. 1*,

- 1913–1926, Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, eds (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 62–74. For an insightful discussion of Benjamin's essay, see Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 14–23.
- 133 *Mallarmé: Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters*, p. 38.
- 134 *Ibid.*
- 135 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 136 See 'Preface', in Richard Aldington et al., *Some Imagist Poets* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915), p. vii.
- 137 *Ibid.*, p. vii. For an explanation of these tenets see Amy Lowell, *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* (New York, Macmillan, 1917).
- 138 From Bertrand Russell's Introduction to the *Tractatus* (TLP, p. 7).
- 139 Commentators often take Wittgenstein to be commenting upon the intrinsic limits of our familiar ways of speaking when he remarks: 'Language disguises the thought; so that from the external form of the clothes one cannot infer the form of the thought they clothe' (4.002).
- 140 Wittgenstein, we might argue, gives voice to this fantasy at section 3.221 of the *Tractatus*: 'Objects can only be *named* [...] I can only speak *about* them: I cannot *put them into words*.' (Here I cite the Pears and McGuinness translation.)
- 141 In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein gives expression to this type of thinking: '“But *this* isn't how it is!” – we say. “Yet *this* is how it has to be!”' (PI, §112).
- 142 Here I cite the Pears and McGuinness translation.
- 143 See Stanley Cavell, 'Declining Decline', in *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, pp. 32–3.
- 144 It would, however, as I have been arguing throughout, be incorrect to think of the ordinary as offering any kind of safe haven from metaphysics. The ordinary provides no fixed and final resting place.
- 145 As Cavell remarks: '[T]he appeal to what we should ordinarily say does not constitute a defence of ordinary beliefs or common sense [...] Proceeding from what is ordinarily said puts a philosopher no closer to ordinary 'beliefs' than to the 'beliefs' or theses of any opposing philosophy, e.g., skepticism. In all cases his problem is to discover the specific plight of mind and circumstance within which a human being

gives voice to his condition.' See Stanley Cavell, 'Knowing and Acknowledging,' in *Must We Mean What We Say?* p. 240.

146 Here I cite the Pears and McGuinness translation.

147 Again, I cite the Pears and McGuinness translation.

Chapter 5

- 1 CV (1984 edition), p. 34.
- 2 Surprisingly little has been written on the relationship between Wittgenstein and Kafka. However, for recent work that makes interesting connections between the two thinkers, see James Conant, 'In the Electoral Colony: Kafka in Florida,' *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 27, no. 4 (Summer 2001), pp. 662–702; Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé, 'The Everyday's Fabulous Beyond: Nonsense, Parable, and the Ethics of the Literary in Kafka and Wittgenstein,' in *Philosophy And Kafka*, Brendan Moran and Carlo Salzani, eds (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013); Rebecca Schuman, "'Unerschütterlich": Kafka's *Proceß*, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, and the Law of Logic,' *The German Quarterly*, 85 (2012), pp. 156–172.
- 3 Mladen Dolar points out that '[t]he German word is impossible to translate in all its ambiguity. It can mean the process of building, construction; the result of building, construction; the result of building, the edifice; the structure, the make (of a plant, of a novel . . .); a jail; a burrow, a hole in the ground, a mine. The oscillation is not only between the process and the result (establishing an equivalence between "process" and "structure"), but also between erecting an edifice and digging a hole.' Mladen Dolar, 'Kafka's Voices,' in Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Lacan: The Silent Partners* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 334 n. 4.
- 4 Franz Kafka, 'The Burrow,' in Nahum N. Glatzer, ed., *Franz Kafka: The Complete Stories* (London: Minerva, 1993), p. 325. All subsequent page references to this volume of the stories will appear in parentheses in the body of the text.
- 5 Kafka does not disclose the exact identity of his narrator.
- 6 Added emphasis.
- 7 Theodor Adorno, 'Notes on Kafka,' in Theodor Adorno, *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), p. 246.

- 8 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward A Minor Literature*, Dana Polan, trans. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 34.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid., p. 36.
- 11 Ibid., p. 37.
- 12 Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, p. 498.
- 13 Rush Rhees, ed., *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 129.
- 14 Cited in Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, p. 236.
- 15 Ibid., p. 237.
- 16 CV (1984 edition), p. 16.
- 17 Ibid., p. 22.
- 18 Ibid., p. 38.
- 19 See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books, 2002).
- 20 Walter Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death', in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico Press, 1999), p. 128.
- 21 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §40 (p. 231/186).
- 22 Martin Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics', in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, David Farrell Krell, ed. (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 100.
- 23 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §40 (p. 230/186).
- 24 Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, vol. 1, Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight, trans. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986), p. 74.
- 25 Ibid., pp. 74–5.
- 26 Peter Gay, ed., *The Freud Reader* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 774.
- 27 Jean Laplanche and Jean Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac Books, 2006), p. 349.
- 28 Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, vol. 1., James Strachey and Angela Richards, eds., James Strachey, trans. (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 444–5.
- 29 Mladen Dolar, 'The Burrow of Sound', *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 22, nos 2 & 3, (2011), pp. 112–38 (pp. 113–14). A number of similar points are also made by Fredric Jameson in his essay 'Kafkas Dialectic', in Fredric Jameson, *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 107.

- 30 Ibid., p. 114.
- 31 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth*, p. 56.
- 32 *PO*, p. 42.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 *CV*, p. 64.
- 35 Robert Pfaller, *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture: Illusions Without Owners* (London: Verso, 2014), p. 198.
- 36 Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, vol. 1, p. 1.
- 37 Waismann's *Theses* were intended to provide a systematic presentation of Wittgenstein's Tractarian philosophy. They are printed as Appendix B in *VC*, pp. 233–61.
- 38 *VC*, pp. 184 & 182. (These remarks were recorded by Waismann on 9 December 1931.)
- 39 Juliet Floyd, 'Wittgenstein and the Inexpressible', in *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life*, p. 214. Conant and Diamond express a similar point in the following way: 'No schema of the form "early Wittgenstein believes *p* and later Wittgenstein believes *not-p*" can ever serve adequately to represent the manner in which Wittgenstein's philosophy develops.' See James Conant and Cora Diamond, 'On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely', in *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*, p. 85. In his study *Nothing is Hidden: Wittgenstein's Criticism of his Early Thought* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), Norman Malcolm endorses *exactly* the kind of doctrinal schema that I, along with Floyd, Diamond and Conant, oppose.
- 40 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 1.
- 41 On the ethical dimensions of the *Investigations* and its relation to modernism, see Ben Ware, 'Seeing the Everyday Otherwise: Vision, Ethics and Utopia in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*', *Critical Quarterly* 56, (2014), pp. 23–39.

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